

### Story 1: The Maiden's Rhapsody

“Ah! Branch Leader Bak, are you going to the Headquarters?!”

Rou Fa's voice consciously rises in pitch.

Her braids are shaking because of the excitement and her spectacles are close to falling off.

Even though she has already started wearing her lab coat as a member of the Science Department, but Rou Fa is still a young lady.

“Yeah, Chief Leverrier told me to go. I also happen to have some information to pass to Komui.”

“Bak Chang – young Asian Branch Head – he quickly straightens out his hat.

An image of someone filled with motivation.

“Tha, that is, can I...can I go as well?!”

Rou Fa voice subconsciously rises in volume.

“Ha?”

Bak looks at her in surprise.

Ignoring the surprised expression, Rou Fa closes the distance between her and Bak.

That person...

Is at the new relocated Headquarters.

“I want to take a good look at the new relocated Headquarters! I also want to inform Jiji-senpai who was transferred, that I have already become a proper member of the Science Department...”

Bak took one look at Rou Fa, and finally nodded his head.

“That's true, from an intern, you have already become a staff member, there will be many opportunities to work together with you in future.”

Rou Fa widens her teary jet black eyes, waiting for the next sentence.

“Okay then, I'll bring you along.”

“That's wonderful!!!”

Rou Fa jumped in joy, arms in the air.

She can see him.

I can see Walker!

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Allen Walker

When I first saw him, I was conducting my internship at the branch Science Department, fighting to be independent. He was badly injured and was under the care of the Asian Branch.

15 year old Exorcist – besides that, I know nothing about him.

Even if he is God's Apostle, letting such a young child enter the frontline is too cruel.

Thinking about these questions, I slowly started getting interested in him.

Those of us who just entered the Order – including me, Rikei and Shifu – have not even taken a good look at Innocence before, so we will definitely not miss the revival of an Innocence who had turned into particles.

"Where's the young male Exorcist?"

I asked.

Walker, who was sitting next to Branch Head Bak, looked towards me with a stunned expression – before breaking into a smile.

He was covered in injuries, and even lost his left arm.

"Nice to meet you."

White hair that would make you think of snow.

That elegant smile doesn't belong to a 15 year old young man, but an adult. His voice was very sweet-sounding.

With regards to his greeting, I wasn't even able to make a sound.

I guess this situation is what first love is like.

It was like an uncountable amount of flowers have bloomed in the deepest part of my heart.

My face turned red, and I wasn't able to look at his face directly.

In short, Walker is totally the type that I like.

I've never thought that I will end up like this...

Just like an unexpected attack, I simply stared at Walker, dumbfounded.

Even though I noticed the shock that Rikei and Shifu felt, but I simply did not care.

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Soon, I will be able to see Walker, whom I have not seen in a long time!

Rou Fa returned to her own room, and loosened her braids.

She carefully combs her wavy black hair.

This time, she does not style her hair into the childish braids, but tied it into two ponytails instead.

Rou Fa suddenly remembers something, and takes out the white flower hair accessories which she bought.

What should I do, even though this was bought earlier.

But it looks a little, a little garish.

But, it should be fine, this standard.

Rou Fa puts on the white flower hair accessory. Even she wore white, then it wouldn't look so strange...perhaps.

Ever since she met Walker, she started to pay more attention to her appearance.

Even her spectacles have been changed to a frameless model...

I wonder how it will turn out.

At least, he would pay more attention to me.

He would think--I'm rather cute.

Rou Fa looks at the mirror.

Jet black eyes reflect her own appearance.

Bright shining eyes filled with anticipation of meeting the person you like in the near future, without a doubt the sort of expression that can only be seen by someone in love.

"Rou Fa, we're going!"

"Okay, I'm coming!"

Hearing Bak's voice, Rou Fa hastily runs out of her room.

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"Wow..."

Rou Fa, who had reached the headquarters, let out a gasp of surprise, and looked around her.

Beneath the ceiling which seems to extend into the sky, there was a huge spacious area.

"How grand..."

It could be seen from the exterior, this is a building full of history.

Surrounding the well ventilated hall was European style arch spires.

It was elegant and at the same time, gives off a peaceful atmosphere.

"This place is like an old Church and Nunnery. This place is huge, don't get lost, okay."

"Sur..sure...ah...the uniforms are new."

Rou Fa focused her gaze on the members of the Headquarters who were walking around.

Black with red lining and more fitting – this is a design filled with tension.

The old Headquarters was badly damaged by the Level 4, because such a fierce battle happened, that's why everyone looks so tense now.

Rou Fa suddenly realised that she did not fit in at all, and quickly straightened out her hair.

I need to cheer up, because I am also part of the Science Department!

Bak turned his attention to Rou Fa.

"Then, ore-sama is going to meet the Inspector and Komui. You can take this time to learn. Don't cause trouble for others."

"Yes!"

Rou Fa straightened her back.

"Oh yes, I'll return to this place in 1 hour."

"I understand!"

Even though Rou Fa's reply was full of energy, but her mind has drifted elsewhere.

--1 hour

If she had one hour, she would be able to have a good talk with Walker then...

In fact, she may even take her first step into the "Headquarters life filled with love" with her dream lover, Walker!

If she could be transferred to Headquarters, she would definitely conduct research as part of the Science Department for Walker, healing his body, tired due to the battles. Oh yes, she can even eat together with him as well. They can play together when there is no work, and slowly improve their relationship, to the extent that they can address each other with "Rou Fa" and "Allen"...if they started dating like this, they can even kiss...or something.

Rou Fa's blood rushes to her face with a 'sha' sound.

"Rou Fa?"

Hearing Bak's surprised voice, Rou Fa's snaps back to reality with a 'pa'.

"Wah, wah wah!"

Now is not the time for imagination!

It was not easy to get a chance to meet Walker.

First, he needs to be found!

It had taken Rou Fa until now to realise that she needs to leave.

"Now then, I'll go and greet everyone in the Order!"

"Is, is that so..."

Seeing Rou Fa's determined expression, Bak took a half step back, feeling slightly intimidated.

"How motivated, but don't get distracted and be careless."

"Yes!"

Rou Fa turned around and ran off with her back to Bak.

I must find Walker! There's only 1 hour!

But, where might he be.

Climbing up the spire, running through the corridor, Rou Fa has almost looked through her immediate surroundings.

The spacious new Headquarters is just like a huge maze.

The people walking around are also people that she does not recognise.

What to do...

Just as Rou Fa started to get anxious, a group of people wearing white suddenly appeared in front of her.

They are cheering enthusiastically at the moment.

People wearing white –

“They’re from the Science Department!”

In the middle of the men is a cute girl with a bright coloured hair tied into a french braid.

“Um...may I know where Allen Walker is?”

Just as Rou Fa asked the question, she got bumped from behind with a “dong”

Rou Fa’s spectacles dropped onto the floor.

“Ah, my spectacles!”

“What’s wrong, lady, don’t be so careless, here.”

Rou Fa put on the spectacles which the person gave her, the boy looked at her stunned face, his forehead had a transparent emerald jade stone.

He seems to be only around 10 years old. Why would such a small child be...and the jade looks to be embedded into his forehead.

Rou Fa looked at the boy suspiciously.

“Thank, thank you...”

“Ah, and I thought Emilia would not be here!”

The boy puffed out his cheeks in anger.

In his line of sight was the girl in the centre of the men from the Science Department.

That’s girl’s name is Emilia?

The boy seems to be unhappy that the girl is that popular.

“What the heck, why is Emilia happy as well...”

“Erhm...”

Rou Fa carefully spoke up.

But the other person asked first.

“Come to think of it, who are you, lady?”

“Eh? Um, I’m Rou Fa from the Asian Branch Science Department.”

“Ah okay, my name is Timothy.”

Rou Fa forced a smile in response to the rare stare she is getting.

“Please look after me then, Timothy-kun.”

Just as Rou Fa finished speaking, the expression on Timothy’s face suddenly changed.

“Ah, who is that, how dare you put your hand on Emilia’s shoulder!”

Following Timothy’s gaze, a cheerfully talking Emilia can be seen.

The man beside her is putting his hand on Emilia’s shoulder in an intimate way.

Seeing how cute Timothy is angrily puffing out his cheeks, Rou Fa couldn’t help but smile.

“Ah haha, so cute~you like Emilia?

“Eh?”

Hearing what Rou Fa said, Timothy’s face turned red in an instant.

“Of, of course not!”

Timothy turned his face away.

But, Rou Fa understands.

No matter how he turns his gaze to other places.

His consciousness will be concentrated on Emilia.

He must be so concerned about her so much that he’s not acting like himself anymore.

Rou Fa smiled slightly.

This is the age to be admiring an elder sister figure after all.

But, just watching like this is not the way, right?

Not taking any action is no good.

You have to be like me, investigating the favourite things of the person you like, and give presents to the person...

Then again, he’s just a child.

His crush is one-sided, and gets frustrated because of that person...

“...What are you grinning like an idiot over?”

Hearing Timothy’s voice, Rou Fa snapped out of her thoughts.

"Nono, I wasn't smiling about anything! Anyway, what is that beautiful piece of jade on your head? That piece of jade that seems stranger to more you look at it. Transparent like crystal, yet carries a green glow.

"This is Innocence! I'm at Exorcist too! Don't look down on me!"

Timothy replied, sticking out his chest.

"Ehhh?"

Rou Fa stared at Timothy without averting her gaze at all.

Such a small child is actually an Exorcist?

This child fights with AKUMA as well?

--oh yes, Exorcist!

Rou Fa remembers her objective.

"Um, I'm searching for the Exorcist Allen Walker now; do you know where he is?"

"Allen? That guy should be in the cafeteria now, that glutton."

"Thank, thank you."

In truth, Walker has a very impressive appetite.

But, he seems to be very concerned about the taste as well...so very often, she will make dango, a dish which she is good at now.

She made it countless times before, and even asked everyone in the Asian Branch to try it.

At the same time, Timothy's patience has reached his limit, and he runs towards Emilia.

"All of you better stop right there! Emilia is MY personal tutor!"

Looking at the small retreating back, Rou Fa runs out.

To the cafeteria!

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The wide corridor was lined with tall windows which can capture and direct sunlight, and seems to extend a far distance away. Rou Fa walked along the sunlight lit corridor, thinking at the same time.

The cafeteria huh...

I would be able to eat with him after I become a staff of the Headquarters.

And, and, after their relationship improves, a situation like "It looks nice, Rou Fa, why don't you feed me?" "Okay sure, here ahh—um." might happen.

Her cheeks feel hot just thinking about it.

That's such a luxury...

If Walker is around...I will gather up my courage and try.

"Here, have a taste." Something like that.

"Ah!"

Engrossed in her imagination, Rou Fa nearly misses the cafeteria.

This can't do!

Rou Fa opened the cafeteria's door, flustered.

Eh?

When Rou Fa looked into the cafeteria, she heard signs of a heated argument.

I wonder what happened.

Rou Fa nervously stepped into the cafeteria.

"Here, ah---um! Good!"

Even though the tone is rough, but a sickeningly sweet voice is produced...

Rou Fa almost groans out of misery.

At the place where everyone is paying attention to, a quarrel between a man (?) and another man (?) ensues.

Even though that person looks like a girl...but actually is a homosexual?

"Like--I--said! At this time, you have to eat something which improves your physical strength, eat stir-fried liver!"

Dong! That person put a bowl on the table, it was a muscular person, with thick lips, a woman—no, a man, who will leave a deep impression.

It wasn't just the appearance, even the personality is strong.

That aura scared Rou Fa a lot.

And the person who was staring daggers at her, no, him, is a skinny guy wearing sunglasses.

His forehead had a tattoo in the shape of an onion, his long hair was combed back and tied into two parts.

He raised his volume, not willing to back off.

"What are you talking about, how can he eat such things after working through the night! At this time, porridge should be eaten, porridge! That's why I said you're a noobie..."

The person wearing sunglasses sighed heavily.

The way he speaks and his actions are just like a woman. Instead of saying that it's a fight between two homosexuals, it would be more appropriate to say that it's between two women.

“Seriously, I have always been in charge of making everyone’s meals in the Order! As a newcomer, what right do you have to state your opinions! And this is the place where I work as well! Barging in without knowing your position is shameless!

Then, the guy with large build crossed his arms and faced the gaze of the man wearing sunglasses.

“I’m here because of my precious Section Chief Reever! I’m going to take care of him from now on, you have been relieved of your duties. Thank you for the hard work you did so far!

“You’re part of the Finder Squad are you! What are you talking about! Making meals for everyone is my job! Which means that taking care of Reever is also my job!”

Ree, Reever-san?

That’s the section chief of the Headquarters Science Department...

After taking a closer look, Reever is currently standing in between the two of them, looking very exhausted.

“Um, may I ask what happened?

Rou Fa approached one of the nearby members, asking.

“This is an argument over Section Chief Reever...that big guy with thick lips is called Bonaire, someone who joined the Finder Squad recently. And that skinny guy with sunglasses is the Head Chef, Jerry.”

“Oh, so it was like that...”

The listless Reever who is stuck between both of them looked up.

“Um, actually, I don’t have much of an appetite...”

“What! That can do, you have to eat something!”

Bonaire quickly leaned towards Reever and Jerry stuck out his hand stubbornly.

“That’s right, you can’t make yourself sick. I’ll feed you! Here, ah---um!”

Food suddenly came from both sides and was forced into Reever’s mouth.

“Argh...”

Pa! Reever collapses.

“Ahhh, oh no! Bring him to the medical ward!”

Bonaire immediately picked Reever up, and dashed out of the cafeteria.

Rou Fa stared stunned at his retreating back.

.... “here, ah—um” plan...

Feeding someone else may be a lot harder than imagined.

Rou Fa looked around the spacious cafeteria.

On the beautifully tiled floor, rows of neatly arranged long tables and benches.

The cafeteria was designed to be extremely spacious, there is still a lot of extra space left over.

It should be possible to eat leisurely in this place.

But, at this point of time, Rou Fa was not relaxed at all.

Rou Fa jogged a bit as she searched through the tables.

Walker, isn't here...

Rou Fa gathered up her courage and walked towards Head Chef Jerry.

"Is there anything you'll want?"

"Can, can I ask, Walker isn't here?"

"Ohh, that child had finished eating and left much earlier."

In the direction in which Jerry was pointing, an impossible mountain of empty dishes.

Ah, Walker, still your usual self...

I see, he had already finished eating and left.

Rou Fa's shoulders drooped.

"Thank you very much..."

Rou Fa walked out of the cafeteria, feeling disheartened, then heard Jerry's voice from behind.

"Allen walked out from that entrance, so he could have gone to the research area in the basement. He seems to be good friends with the children from the Science Department."

"Is it this door, thank, thank you...!"

After getting an unexpected piece of information, Rou Fa's feelings finally settled down.

The research area...

Even though they would not be able to eat together, but drinking a cup of after meal coffee would not be that bad as well!

To have a happy conversation...

I have to rush to the research area!

Just as she was running across the corridor towards the staircase that led to the basement, a young lady was heading in her direction.

She's...

"Lenalee!"

Calling out her name, Lenalee headed towards her with a smile.

"Ah, you're from the Asian Branch...I remember you're called Rou Fa."

Lenalee Lee. A beautiful girl, and an Exorcist as well.

She has beautiful black hair, a bright black eyes.

Even as a girl, her heartbeat quickens just looking at her.

“What’s wrong, you’re anxious. Are you lost?”

“Ah, that is, I want to go to the Research Area.”

Rou Fa started to say, suddenly a voice came from above her.

“Yo, Lenalee Lee.”

“Ah, Section Chief Peck.

The person who appeared is a man who wears spectacles and uses a hair tie to tie all his hair back.

He’s wearing white, probably part of the Science Department.

“It’s still early, so I was thinking of drinking coffee with you.”

Just then, Peck finally registers Rou Fa’s existence.

“Ah, you are?”

“I’m Rou Fa from the Asian Branch Science Department.”

Rou Fa directs a nod towards Peck.

“Hey, I’m the Section Chief of the second section of the Science Department, I’m Gregory Peck.”

“Please take care of me.”

Rou Fa says, but feels uneasy about something.

I wonder what’s wrong, that person, looks really capable.

And...

At the same time, she notices Peck’s line of sight is directly at Lenalee’s legs.

Irritating, that guy, is so underhanded...

“Lenalee Lee, I have something to say to you, so let’s go to the longue, no one will disturb us there.”

“Um, that is...I...”

Lenalee looks away, feeling troubled.

Peck forcefully puts his arm around Lenalee’s slim shoulders.

“Do you have any business with my younger sister, Section Chief Peck?”

Suddenly, a tall man appears in front of Lenalee.

This sort of existence is definitely overwhelming.

Rou Fa lets out a sigh of relief.

It’s Supervisor Komui!

The light reflects off his spectacles.

Peck looks at Komui with a very disgruntled face.

“...I’m just trying to interact more with the Exorcists. Didn’t I just transfer here from Central?”

“I think logically, you should get along with the other people from the Science Department first.”

“Logically, huh...”

Peck lips curved upwards a little.

“Haven’t you also done a lot of things on your own accord as well? I heard you caused a lot of trouble for Assistant Bridget Fay.”

“The current problem has nothing to do with my actions. Forcefully inviting a lady who you’re not very familiar with, is this the way Central operates?”

“I wanted to say this since earlier, but Supervisor-sama, being so stubborn about your sister, isn’t that a bit of a problem? Do you know the meaning of being unable to differentiate between personal and work matters?

Peck puts his hand on Lenalee’s shoulder.

Pa.

Rou Fa hears something snapping in Komui’s heart.

All the expression has disappeared from his face.

Then, he fishes out a remote control from his coat.

“Heheheheh...”

Komui’s eyes---are glowing. Seems like he’s planning something.

“...If you want to invite Lenalee, then defeat Komurin first!”

“...Komurin?”

Rou Fa and Peck ask at the same time.

“Nii, nii-san!”

Lenalee has turned pale.

Clank----clank----

A very ominous sound was approaching this place.

Then.

“Kyaaaa!”

Rou Fa saw a hexagon shaped robot rapidly approaching from the other end of the corridor, and shouted out of reflex.

There was a “K” symbol on the robot’s head.

“What, what is this, this robot with such a bad design----!”

Peck shouts.

“Okay, go Komurin! Now, show your prowess!”

Komurin approaches Peck with strong looking steps, making a ka-cha, ka-cha sound.

With only 1 foot, the wall which was hit lost a big chunk, the glass on windows shatter, even the floor was destroyed.

If it was a human, he will be sent flying just approaching it.

Komui quickly grabs Lenalee and Rou Fa’s arms and pulls them away from Peck.

And then, presses the remote control again.

“Wahhhhh!”

Komurin chases after Peck, who was escaping, without holding back.

“Supervisor!”

A very cold and strict voice is heard.

Komui’s smile disappeared and turns around, looking rather shocked.

It was a person with tea coloured wavy hair styled into a wave.

She was wearing a fitting pencil skirt and high heels and looks very capable.

“Assistant Fay...”

That Komui actually looked at her rather timidly.

“What is the meaning of this!”

Fay scrutinised the damage done in the corridor.

“No, this isn’t...”

“It’s already time for the meeting with Branch Head Bak Chang! I initially thought you were just escaping paperwork and your duties, and you were actually here doing this! The meeting will take place 34 minutes later, and there are still 258 documents for you to approve.

Fay started talking non-stop, as she looked at the damage Komurin left behind with a fed up expression.

“I really can’t let you leave my line of sight! ....the damage amounts up to...then again, about that robot, we should have---”

Fay suddenly stopped in the middle of her sentence.

Peck was currently running towards them, and of course, following behind him is the outline of Komurin, destroying the corridor at the same time.

“Ahhhhh!”

“Wahhhhhh!”

Komurin raises one foot, preparing to give Peck a strong blow.

“Wah, argh!”

Peck moves to the side, and barely avoided the attack.

Komurin foot hits thin air and pierces the corridor, the shockwave hits the surrounding people.

“Ah!”

“Lenalee!”

The impact made Lenalee lose her footing, RouFa reaches out of her, but was unable to grab her.

--Lenalee!

“Ah, that was dangerous!”

The person who mysteriously appeared to support the Lenalee who almost fell over from behind is a young man with red hair---the Exorcist Lavi.

He wears a huge patterned bandana on his head and he wears an eye patch over his right eye.

“Sigh, Komui is so hard to handle. Ah, you’re from the Asian Branch?”

Lavi smiles at Rou Fa.

That amiable smile is enough to attract anyone who sees it.

“This happens often, so you can just let them be.”

Saying that, Lavi grabs Rou Fa and Lenalee’s shoulders.

Happens, happens often? This sort of big ruckus?

...It looks difficult to work in the Headquarters.

Even in the cafeteria just now, that was a disturbance as well.

But, Rou Fa gave herself encouragement.

But, I can be together with Walker!

Lavi decides to leave the scene quickly.

“Ah, Lavi!”

“Bookman Junior!”

Even if Komui and Peck are shouting angrily, the person it was directed at did not register it at all, and stuck out his tongue at the two of them.

“Whatever, after such a commotion, they will feel less tense.”

Rou Fa’s heart is racing, and lifts up her head to look at Lavi.

Lavi....

Amongst the Exorcists, there is a rare existence known as the Bookman.

Even though she is interested in having this person be part of her research...but now is not the time.

“Um, I, I need to go to the Research Area now, so I’ll be taking my leave.”

Rou Fa nods.

As long as I go to the Research Area—I’ll be able to see Walker—

What sort of reaction will he have when he sees me.

He must be shocked. Then he will spread his arms, and shout “Rou Fa”

And the, ahah, what should I do!

I want to run into his arms.

Rou Fa realizes that she’s over imagining things again.

Ah, the time is passing bit by bit.

I need to be faster.

Just as Rou Fa is prepared to run off, she suddenly stopped in her tracks.

“That, that is...”

The pillar in the corridor has very beautiful carvings.

Bak is currently standing in its shadow.

Why, why would he be in that sort of place? And he’s even holding a camera.

In his line of sight, is Lenalee who is currently talking to Lavi.

...Chief Bak’s once sided crush on Lenalee, and even has the hobby of secretly taking pictures, this is really...

Rou Fa shakes her head fervently.

I just act like I did not see that. If I talk to him casually, he’ll probably suggest returning, that would be bad!

Rou Fa looks at the clock.

Only 30 minutes left!

Rou Fa runs out.

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Finally found the staircase which leads to the basement.

“How, how deep!

An elaborate curve traces out the stairs leading down.

Because it was very dark, Rou Fa walked down the stairs, being careful not to trip.

“Hah...hah”

Rou Fa, who had finally reached the Research Area, re-adjusted her breathing.

“Wow...”

In the huge space before her, there were a lot of researchers wearing white.

This spacious area was lined with bookshelves and its collection is more diverse than a small library.

Rou Fa faced this huge space uneasily, and cautiously stepped into it. Whatever energy she had, it was suppressed with the overwhelming atmosphere.

“How great...there’s actually so many people...”

The space was divided into a few sectors. Occasionally, in some areas, a mysterious fog will be produced, accompanied with a “wah!”, a very lively place.

Rou Fa watched these sectors, her heart beating quickly.

This is the work of the Headquarters, will I work here too.

Even it looks hard, but as long as I think of working together with Walker, I will be able to work hard!

Where might Walker be?

When Rou Fa imagined Walker welcoming her with open arms, her face turned red.

“Ah, um, sorry for disturbing...”

Rou Fa, who was looking around filled with expectations, suddenly jumped up.

It was a pair of open arms

--but it belonged to a tied up Kanda Yu.

What, what is this....

Facing a situation she had never thought about, Rou Fa cried out involuntarily.

In the space that extended out, there was Jiji from the first section, Rob, Bookman and Kanda Yu, these four people.

This, this weird atmosphere...and, why is he tied up...

“Oh, it’s Rou Fa!”

Jiji, seeing Rou Fa, beamed. Jiji used to be from the Asian Branch, and was transferred here after the new Headquarters was completed.

How nostalgic. But even though it’s nostalgic

--the person with open arms is not Walker, but Kanda

--the person who greeted me is not Walker, but Jiji-senpai.

Rou Fa's dream shatters into pieces.

"What, what are you doing?"

Kanda glares at his surroundings, like he's going to kill someone soon.

Rob was not threatened by Kanda at all, and touches his long black hair.

"Hair colour: Black, soft feeling, straight, thin, amount is normal..."

"You bastard, what do you want..."

Kanda asked with a threatening tone.

"Nothing much, we were just asked by Bookman. He said that he wants to have hair just like Kanda-kun."

"Disgusting!"

Kanda growls, but no one intends to stop.

"It's fine, it's fine, listen to us obediently, okay!"

Rob comforts Kanda with a warm smile.

"So, I want to develop a hair growth potion that can grow hair just like Kanda's. He's helping me now."

"It's forced!"

"You can actually be baited with soba, Kanda also had his cute side!"

Rob said while smiling.

"Che...in the end, whatever you do is useless, your scalp is already dried out."

"What did you say!"

Even though Kanda only mumbled it, but Bookman did not miss that sentence at all and let out a fury of Panda punches.

"Oh yes, Rou Fa, what are you in the Headquarters for?"

Jiji asked. Rou Fa is surprised.

"Ah, I'm here to find Walker..."

"Oh hoho, Allen, is it..."

Jiji laughs while looking at Rou Fa.

"Did you specially come over to see Allen?"

"Erhm, that is..."

"Oh really, did you bring some dango as a prize~~?"

Jiji said playfully as Rou Fa blushes.

“No, that’s not it...I, I became a proper member of the Science Department, so I want to come over to say hi...”

“That guy, sure is popular...”

Bookman said softly.

“Eh?”

Hearing this sentence, Rou Fa is rather surprised.

“What, what does that mean?”

Rou Fa asks Bookman for more clarification.

“I’ll tell you in secret. I heard from Lavi, you see, Allen was kissed by one of the girls from the Noah Clan, and it was on the lips!

“Ki,kiss?!”

Rou Fa found it hard to believe this sentence, her brain is humming.

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Walker kissed a girl. And it was on the lips...

Rou Fa’s legs are shaking, and there was some staggering as well.

Why? Does Walker like that girl?

What happened when I wasn’t around?

Kissed a girl...a girl...a girl...

“...he’s actually so close to a girl from the Noah Clan. But this will cause people to misunderstand...”

Bookman said seriously, but his words did not reach Rou Fa’s ears, who was still in shock.

“Kissing, huh, but you don’t have to be so traumatised Rou Fa. A first kiss is normally neglected in many stories anyway.”

Jiji takes a look at Kanda.

“The person who gave Kanda’s first kiss is me!”

“Hah?! Shut up, don’t say anything!”

Even though Kanda started shouting, but Rob was nodding and confirming it with a “yeah, yeah.”

At that time, Jiji was severely drunk. Then he got very excited and hugged Kanda who happened to be passing by, and kissed him, just like that.

“But, kissing between men is not counted, so you don’t have to mind it!”

Jiji said while laughing.

“Urgh...”

Kanda is shaking.

“Yeah, yeah, that seems to be when Kanda was 13—

“You bunch of bastards...”

Kanda growled at them with a very chilled voice, like those dead people who have just escaped from hell.

His black eyes were filled with fury.

“Kan, Kanda...”

Jiji froze.

Kanda forcefully freed himself from his bonds.

“Wa, wah!”

Then he slowly stood up, exuding an invisible killing aura.

Like you will be cut if you try to touch him.

“Kan, kanda? Calm down a bit...please?”

Kanda totally ignored Rob who was trying to comfort him and pulled out Mugen without any hesitation.

“...try saying one more word. You should have prepared yourself for death already, have you?”

“Calm, calm down!”

Jiji words were not heard by Kanda at all.

He swings Mugen around carelessly.

“Wa, wah---!!”

“Ahhhh!!”

Rou Fa protects her head as she escapes.

From behind her, she hears Bookman say “My hair growth formula---!” that sort of pitiful cry, but she does not look back.

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Sob, sniff.

Rou Fa takes off her spectacles and uses the sleeve of her white coat to wipe away her tears.

Not only was Walker not around, she even heard such a traumatising fact...

She had a feeling, that she would not be able to get up again.

Even though I mustered all my courage to come to the Headquarters...

Something about a kiss, something about a kiss, something about a kiss...

I want to wake up from my nightmare!

Forget about this incident!

Walker must be in some other part of the research area.

After I see his face, I'll be able to forget about such frustrating things!

Rou Fa starts to move towards another corner.

It looks like there are two men talking.

Rou Fa approaches them quietly.

They don't look like weird people.

I don't want to be involved in anymore weird incidents again.

"Ah---um incident", "Komurin incident", and "lips sticking together incident" ...all these nightmare like incidents are repeating themselves in Rou Fa's head one by one.

Does the Headquarters always feel like this...

Rou Fa stole a sideways glance at the two people talking next to her.

"Ah..."

Even though she had never met them before, but she read about them in the files.

Exorcists Chaoji and Marie.

Marie has a large build and a gentle look.

Chaoji, with a spiky hairstyle made with wax, is a youth with freckles.

They seem to be talking about something, but Marie suddenly turns around, shocked.

"I think I heard Miranda's voice..."

"Eh?"

"She should be in the book storage room. It looks like she's been squashed under the shelves and unable to move. I'll go and save her."

"You actually heard a sound like that? Marie's sense of hearing is really many times more sensitive than a normal human..."

Chaoji is surprised. In such a noisy environment underground, it's impossible to differentiate everyone's voice from one another.

He looks up at Marie, like he had decided something.

"...You really save Miranda very often!"

"And so?"

The two of them looked at each other for a moment.

“...a lot of members would have found themselves in the same situation, why is Miranda’s voice the only one which you would not miss out...”

Chaoji says while breaking eye contact.

Looking at his actions, Marie seems to realise something, and his face suddenly turns red.

“...anyway, I’m going.”

Marie turns around quickly and leaves.

Chaoji watches Marie leave. It was then he notices Rou Fa standing nearby. Rou Fa looks down suddenly.

“You look unfamiliar. You’re from the Science Department?”

Because both of them are Asian, so Chaoji observes her with interest.

“I’m Rou Fa from the Science Department.”

“Are you alright? You face...looks like you’ve been crying...has something happened?”

“Ah, that is...”

Rou Fa could not answer all of a sudden.

The kissing, is it true or not?

As long as she thinks about that, her chest feels like it is being ripped apart.

But, I still want to see him. Walker!

“Do you know where Allen Walker is?”

“Allen Walker?”

It feels like the air has frozen.

Upon hearing that name, Chaoji’s expression, which was kind and helpful just before, froze, he observes Rou Fa like he searching for something.

What’s, what’s wrong?

Did I say something strange?

But Chaoji did not say anything and quietly moves his line of sight elsewhere.

“He may have gone with everyone to the games room. Because there’s an international chess competition. In the room eight doors from here.

“Thank you very much!”

Rou Fa clenches her fists, like she’s trying to give her encouragement.

This time, I must see him. I can see him, definitely.

Walker!

If not, nothing will be started.

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Rou Fa arrives at a door with sign “Games Room” pasted on it.

Rou Fa knocks on the door lightly, and pushes it open gently.

“Wow...”

It is a room with elaborate decorations, giving people a feeling that they’re not in the research area anymore. The floor is covered by a carpet with elegant patterns, making it hard to believe this is an experiment area.

There is tension in the air.

A youth with small build wearing glasses and a skinny lady with a fashionable hairstyle and sitting facing each other, with an international chessboard in the middle.

Rou Fa recognizes that youth. He’s Johnny from the Science Department.

Rou Fa approaches the pair amongst the noisy spectators.

“Hey...if it’s like this...”

“Ah, Johnny’s throne has been taken by Cash.”

Eh?

Rou Fa looks at the chessboard. Even though she cannot analyse the battle situation, but the lady known as Cash seemed to have the upper hand.

“Checkmate.”

Cash quietly put on her Knight.

Johnny lowers his head, disappointed.

“Wa” The surrounding people cheered.

“Cash won!”

“That’s so great!”

“Cash is the new Champion!”

Compared to the excited audience over the result, Cash gets up, calmly.

Johnny looks up at the Queen like Cash.

His cheeks are blushing, and the eyes behind his spectacles are sparkling.

Compared to the regret from losing, the feeling of respect towards the competitor is much stronger.

Cash took a look at Johnny, who had that expression.

“It’s too early for you to play chess with me.”

She left that sentence and leaves without looking back.

"How, how cool..."

The people around just watch her leave.

Rou Fa looks at the crowd around her, Allen was not in there.

"Sigh..."

I thought I would finally be able to meet him.

Johnny, who seems to be greatly affected by the loss, is staring at the chessboard.

Even though she wants to talk to Johnny, but Rou Fa realised that there is no more time.

Looking around her, Rou Fa starts to ask around.

"Um, is Walker here?"

"Strange, he isn't here?"

"He was around in the beginning, wasn't he?"

Rou Fa drooped her shoulders, disappointed.

Even though she spent so much effort searching, she was still unable to meet him...

A discouraged Rou Fa was about to leave the Games Room, when she was stopped by Johnny. He seems to have come back to his senses.

"You're the person, who bought the dango, right?"

"Ah, yes."

"There's something I wanted to tell you when I saw you. It's regarding Allen."

Rou Fa looks at Johnny, surprised.

Johnny stands up, walks to Rou Fa's side and whispered to her.

"That's person position is very complicated now? Central is observing him now, and his team mates are suspecting if he is actually one of the Noah."

Her chest throbs, as if it's being squeezed.

--kissed a female Noah.

Even though she was hurt by that incident, but the current situation seems more complicated.

They actually said he is one of the Noah.

Ah, could it be that just now, the person known as Johnny felt conflicted because of that sentence?

"Even though Allen keeps smiling and says it's okay. But—it must be painful. More painful than we can imagine.

Rou Fa remembers, Allen's smiling face.

A refreshing smile, without any pretence.

But, behind that smile, how many injuries are there?

How does he manage to take all that pain, and continue showing that smile?

“I’m, so shy...I want to meet Walker, but it seems that I’m too hasty...”

“You’re wrong! That honest feeling of yours is very important to Allen. You’ll definitely be able to save him.”

Is that true.

If it’s true.

If I’m able to be of help to me, I’ll be really happy.”

“Thank you.”

Rou Fa nods and leaves the Games Room.

There’s still 10 minutes.

It’s, already impossible.

This must be fate.

The person whom I’m unable to reach-- (pika318: as in feelings)

I know from the depths of my soul, I won’t able to meet him.

I can’t let Branch Head Bak wait for too long.

Let’s leave the research area.

\*\*\*

Rou Fa, who has climbed up the stairs, walked along the corridor, listless.

This peace makes it hard to envision all the storm-like events which happened earlier.

She sees the mirror on the corridor.

Because she cried, her eyes are a bit swollen. Her originally neat hair has been messed up, and the accessory is crooked.

Seeing her pitiful reflection in the mirror adorned with roses made Rou Fa want to cry again.

But, I---

“I have always liked you!”

Suddenly hearing a women’s voice, Rou Fa looked through a half open door.

The wall was covered with bookshelves, lined with many precious books.

And in the middle, a sofa and table were placed.

There was a woman in a nurse uniform in the room, together with a tall man.

That, that person, is the Exorcist, Krory.

Krory's face is so red that it has reached his eyes

"Um, how should I say it, I..."

His thin arms, which are shaking, accidentally hit a nearby bookshelf, the books fall over.

A huge bound book hits Krory's leg.

"Ow,owowowow! Books...ah...ah!"

Rou Fa closes her eyes in reflex.

It has become a disaster...

"Book, book..."

Krory bends over to pick up the book, but his leg does not listen to him.

He loses his balance completely and falls over together with the table.

"Argh!"

The vase, which was on the table flies off, and the flowers decorating the vase are scattered around the room.

"Book, book...and the flowers...!"

Seeing the flowers scattered around, Krory is flustered, not knowing what to pick up first, when suddenly, he stops.

"...?"

What's wrong with him?

What happened to him?

Rou Fa feels it.

Krory is staring at a red rose.

As if the pathetic appearance just now was an act, his expression changed to one of sincerity.

He stands up quickly.

Then faced the woman in the nurse's uniform with his head lowered.

"I thank you for your feelings. But, in my heart, there is still a woman I am unable to forget, I'm sorry..."

The woman in nurse's uniform whom Krory was looking at, tightly pursued her mouth.

Then she opened her slightly shaking lips.

"...I understand. Then, from today onwards, please be my good friend."

The woman dressed in nurse's uniform is crying.

“Ah...”

Then she ran past Rou Fa, who was standing beside the door.

Krory just stares at the brightly coloured red rose. Rou Fa was unable to look away from his overly sad expression.

“Is someone there?”

Hearing the sudden inquiry, Rou Fa is shocked.

“Um...”

Rou Fa walks into the reading room nervously.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to eavesdrop...”

Krory opens his eyes slowly.

“Ah, I remember that you’re from the Asian Branch...”

He looks at Rou Fa with an unimaginably gentle expression, Rou Fa does not know how to react.

“Are you actually here to see Allen?”

“Ah, um, yes.”

Rou Fa is shocked. How did he know?

Is it because of the dango I gave to Allen as a comfort gift?

Is this incident actually common knowledge to everyone?

Rou Fa is suddenly embarrassed.

“If it’s Allen, he was called out by the Inspector just now. I estimate that he’s struggling with the flood of paperwork in the conference room right now.

“...He’s busy, as expected.”

Rou Fa says dejectedly.

Her feelings are sinking just like a stone thrown into water.

I’m so excited, just like an idiot.

“I’m sorry to disturb you. Then, I’ll be going back first...”

Rou Fa mumbles, Krory, shocked at her sentence, asks.

“Are you returning?”

“Yes. There’s no more time. Walker sounds busy, he wouldn’t have any time to meet me...”

The more she says, the colder she feels.

To the Rou Fa who was preparing to leave, Krory said.

“Are you giving up?”

“Eh?”

Rou Fa looks back in surprise.

“There are some people who want to meet someone, but no matter how they want it, they would not be able to.”

“Krory...”

“If it was me, even if I only have a probability of one in ten thousand—I will still take the chance.”

Rou Fa picks up the red rose on the floor and looks at Rou Fa with a very serious expression.

As if the rose is the person he loves.

The belief he presented, touched Rou Fa deeply.

“Even if you regret, I will be too late. Now, in this era, what you need to do is to take out your courage.”

Even though what Krory said is the truth, but it's very heavy.

That's right, the world now is a battlefield.

There may be no tomorrow.

Therefore, if it's that way—the more you would want to meet the person you like.

Didn't I come here with this sort of mentality?

One more time...gather up the courage once more.

“...Yes!”

Rou Fa runs out.

Looking back, she realises Krory is looking at the brightly coloured red rose.

“Eliade...”

She hears this soft call.

This call, sounds like—the name of a woman that someone loves.

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“Conference room, conference room!!”

There's still two more minutes to the meeting time. She'll definitely not make it. But, all she can do is run.

She confirms with the map with a sidelong glance.

Turn right at the corridor in front, then go straight.

Her heart is pounding, and it hurts.

I want to meet him.

One glance is enough.

Like that would be good enough---

At this moment, Rou Fa cannot believe her eyes.

Running towards her, is a white haired youth.

---it's Walker!

Allen shouts to someone behind him.

"Please know your limit! Don't always say documents, documents!"

"Wait, Walker!"

A youth who looks like an Inspector is chasing behind, with Timcanpi biting onto him.

"Oww! Let go!"

"Good job, Tim!"

Just then, Allen looked this way.

Then widened his eyes, shocked.

"Strange...Rou Fa?"

"Walker!!"

She knows that her voice is off key.

As long as she sees his face, hears his voice, the world will be full of hope.

It's been like that ever since she first saw him.

It had nothing to do with him being an Exorcist.

It doesn't matter if he's one of the Noah or not.

Now, being beside him, listening to his voice, looking at his smile—this is my only wish.

Allen approaches, confused.

"What's wrong, did you come to the Order for something?"

"I...I..."

I'm here to see you!

Just as she is about to say it, Allen opens his mouth.

"Ah, that white flower accessory, it's really cute. It suits you."

"~~~~~!!"

Rou Fa could not hold it in anymore, her tears roll down her face.

Even though she knows how pathetic it appears to Allen, she cannot stop.

She needs to tell him.

Which is why she came here.

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“I’m happy...that I...can see Allen...”

“Me too.”

Rou Fa can’t help but look up to see Allen’s face.

Allen is truly smiling in happiness.

It can be said that no other smile is this dazzling.

In the moment when she saw the smile, Rou Fa thought.

Ahah, I’m, really very fortunate.

For him, I will do anything.

No matter who it is, even if he is enemies with the world, I will still support him.

“Okay, Rou Fa, don’t cry.”

His warm voice is very comfortable.

She hopes that time will stop.

Walker.

I, like you--

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## **Story 2: Lost Fragment of Snow**

Red : A child with a grotesque red arm .

Mana Walker: A newcomer clown employed by the circus

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Snow falls quietly onto the Earth.

As if it is healing the land which has been abused.

Under the layer of gray clouds which stretch on endlessly, there stands a young boy.

He is young, but alone.

The boy has no name.

He is only referred to as Red .

Simply because of his strange, wrinkled left arm –

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Thunder – like claps and cheers break the silence.

“Thank you for everyone’s patronage today.”

It is the voice of the pleased Ringmaster.

It looks like today’s performance is successful as well.

Thought Red distractedly as he polishes the tools in the backstage of the circus.

From the slit in the hanging screens, the stage surrounded by lights could be seen. It was beautiful and full of life—contrasting with the darkness and eeriness of the backstage.

With only a small light bulb swinging above his head, Red sits on the freezing floor and concentrates on polishing the rings.

The red and white striped rings are so big that he can only hold one.

Using both his legs to clamp the ring, and supporting it with his mostly unmovable left arm , he wipes the ring with his more nimble right hand.

In the beginning, he was unable to do these jobs well, and would always curse his left arm , but he is used to it now.

Grind the knives, then wash the clothes. The person who does odd jobs needs to do many things.

“Urgh...”

Red ’s body is shaking because of the cold.

The tent, made up of only one piece of cloth, is very cold.

In order for his hand to gain some warmth, Red exhales some air on his hand.

Just then, even louder cheers and claps could be heard from the stage, it sounds like they are seeing of the performers who have completed their act.

It looks like they are returning soon.

After a while, the backstage was also filled with a festive atmosphere.

The costumes made by the skilled workman are very bright.

A clown wearing a brightly coloured clown suit. An accordion player with a pleated blouse. The magician's sleeve was decorated with a star shaped golden button, and shone with the light. The hair accessory decorated with flowers and jewels belonged to the female trapeze artist. The one wearing black and white stripes was the animal trainer—

The performers, who have yet to snap out from the excitement felt during the performance, walked past Red with a proud air around them.

Red glanced downwards at his own clothing.

It was extremely sloppy around the collar, and the shirt was very dirty as well. A very short vest was worn as the outer layer. In contrast, his shorts were very big, and can even be pulled to his shoulder level.

Looking at the tragic state of his clothes, it felt really out of place.

The performers put their respective props in succession in front of Red, who had not moved at all.

Of course, no one will speak to him.

“The guests’ interests today were really high.”

“Yeah, I felt really great when I was balancing on the ball.”

“Me too, at that time, I really wanted to flip backwards twice.

All of the happy conversations passed over the head of Red.

No one looked at Red in the eye.

It has always been that way.

Yes, it has always been that way.

He clenched his right hand tightly, and this told him that, it was as if his heart had been pierced by a knife, an uncontrollable grief bubbling up.

Thinking that way, Red put more force behind the hand polishing the ring.

“You’re still the same, so frustrated and hot tempered!”

The person who said it was the clown Cosmos, his mouth twisted in a vulgar smile.

A white clown outfit. And on the left side of his face, a red star which is unique to the clown.

It was totally impossible to see his expression underneath the thick layer of makeup and powder, but the only fact known is the malicious twinkle in his eye.

Red looks up at Cosmos, without stopping the polishing of the prop.

He cannot let this sort of guy see his weakness.

Red immediately his hand from shaking.

Yes, this happens often.

“Every time I see your face, I lose my motivation.”

Cosmos roughly pushes Red in the chest.

Red, who is still young—not even ten years old, was flung back easily.

“And, your disgusting arm! Not only is it dirty, it can’t even move, can it? How can such a useless fellow like you manage to stay here!”

Red looks at his left arm.

On it were a few deep wrinkles, just like an arm which had been dyed by a thick coating of blood. It took him a lot of effort just to make his hand move a tiny bit.

Even though he wanted it to move just like his right arm, he can’t do anything.

But—this sort of thing, has nothing to do with Cosmos.

Even he knows that this happens often, but as usual, he is unable to control his hatred for Cosmos.

Red’s eyes naturally fill up with power.

The smile suddenly disappeared from the edge of Cosmos’ mouth.

“What’s up with you, that sort of arrogant look!”

Cosmos’ fist hit Red’s chest, he groans softly. The heavy hit made him sick.

Red curled up as he knelt on the floor.

Cosmos had always been that way. Making him suffer in places where it is hard to see from the outside.

“What are you saying, hahh! You’re just a piece of trash!”

This time, Cosmos used his leg to kick Red in the stomach.

Red clenched his teeth.

How can he shout?

How can he cry?

This is his only way of rebelling.

He understands the reason behind Cosmos' frustration.

The new clown has stolen away his popularity.

He planned for himself to always be the best—to this sort of Cosmos, the fact that other people could surpass him, is the hardest fact to swallow.

He wants to break Red into pieces to vent his anger. Facing this sort of Cosmos, from the bottom of his heart, Red feels only contempt towards him.

I will absolutely not give in to this sort of person.

But Cosmos would not let him off easily.

As if he wanted Red to see his shining sneakers, Cosmos cruelly kicks Red's stomach.

He kicked again and again, causing Red to slowly lose his consciousness.

Even then, Cosmos did not forgive and finally aimed a kick at Red's face.

Red's small body was flung away by the force of the kick, and crashed into the pile of props.

"What is that noise!"

The Ringmaster heard the loud crash and rushed out.

He wears a top hat on his head and has a brush moustache under his nose.

Even though he is short, his pants are tight around his large belly. The buttons on the vertically striped shirt looked like it was going out pop out any moment.

The Ringmaster turned towards Cosmos, his tummy shaking.

"Cosmos, did something happen?"

The Ringmaster asked Cosmos first, as he thought it was due to the Clown's vigorous activity.

"This bastard was lazing around. For the future of the circus, I need to teach him a lesson!"

Cosmos smiled at the Ringmaster as if he was trying to flatter him.

--That's not it!

Even though he wanted to say that, no sound came out in the end.

No, even if Red denied it, the Ringmaster wouldn't listen anyway.

In front of the Ringmaster who is only interested in money, how he sees these two people is very clear.

The Ringmaster looks at Red with cold eyes.

"...seriously, not only can you not make money, you still want to slack off. Forget about dinner tonight."

The Ringmaster said impatiently. Then he hauls Red up.

"Who was it that took you in, with no memories and ugly looks, who was it that gave you a place to live and a job? Hmm?"

The Ringmaster leans his pudgy face close.

If he did not answer, then he won't have a place to belong to anymore.

"...It's you, the Ringmaster."

"Who was it that refused to go on stage to perform and insisted on doing odd jobs? Ah?"

"...Me."

Red replied, the Ringmaster nods in satisfaction.

"That's right, listen up, I will not allow you to slack off. For Cosmos to think of the circus is really rare."

"No, it's what I'm supposed to do."

Cosmos smiled at the Ringmaster with a smile meant to flatter.

"Really, I spent so much money buying you...you should at least earn my capital back! Definitely no slacking!"

The Ringmaster let go as he said so.

Cosmos seemed to be satisfied at last and leaves with the Ringmaster, smiling and humming to himself.

The other members look away from Red, who had collapsed on the ground, like they did not want to be involved, and left quickly. In the end, no one was left.

In the backstage, which had regained its silence, Red, who is alone, finally tries to stand up.

The chilliness of the floor sends a shock through his body.

“Urgh...”

After an unknown amount of time, the nauseous abdominal pain finally subsided a bit.

Red gets up shakily.

No one will look at me. But, it's fine like this. I don't want to care about you people either.

He puts the ring which he had polished into the box, and to let out his feelings of frustration, Red walks out of the tent.

“Ah.....”

It's a silver world outside.

White snow drifts down slowly.

No wonder it's so cold.

The circus which was originally filled with people, noisy and extravagant, is currently standing in the square, just like a quietly blooming flower.

Red walks a few steps, unconvinced.

Shashahsha, his foot sinks into the snow.

The air he blows out is white, bone piercing cold seeps in through his thin shirt.

Even then, Red does not stop walking.

There is no place to go. But, he just wants to leave this place.

Looking at the trees which have been covered by snow, just like a white sculpture.

This comforted his soul a bit.

Seeing the snow that dyes everything white, it is as if his soul has turned pristine white.

It feels as if all his troubled have been forgotten.

Far away from the circus tent, Red kneels on the ground.

Quietly scooping up some of the snow, and placing some on his cheeks, which are as hot as fire. Because of Cosmos' hits, the corner of his mouth has cracked.

Ah, even though it is painful, the coldness of the snow made him feel comfortable.

--What, in the world am I doing.

Red does not have any memories of the past. When he became aware, he realised that he had been sold to the circus.

Because he refused to perform on stage, so he decided to do odd jobs to earn a living.

The Ringmaster saw him as a piece of trash who cannot earn money and drifted away from him, he also became an outlet for Cosmos when he was angry, he was even forced by other members to do various things.

When can I—be freed from all these things.

Behind these strong feelings, are feelings of frustration and unease—how is he going to survive with a left arm like this.

Red touches his already protesting stomach, it still feels painful.

Now—he can't leave. He still needs to continue this humiliating and lonely life.

Because he is young, and has no one to depend on.

Red clenches his teeth.

“Eh? You're from the circus?”

Hearing this innocent voice, Red can't help but look up.

It was a kind looking boy wearing a large coat, the boy watches with interest.

His cheeks look rather plump.

He looks around my age.

Red looks at the young boy with a puzzled expression.

“It's really great, the circus!”

“...”

“What tricks do you perform?”

Hearing this, Red feels a tightness in his heart.

“Nothing much...”

--This guy who doesn't know any tricks and does nothing!

The Ringmaster's words resonate in his ear.

“Wow...the circus, it's great. You can go to a lot of cities? And can see all sorts of people...it's awesome!”

The young boy continues talking without any prompting.

No matter which city I go to, and who I meet, it's all the same to me.

Red rolls up his sleeve.

“...!!”

He knows that the boy's expression has frozen.

A scary, red left arm covered in wrinkles.

“Erhm, that is, has...has something been done to your arm?”

“...”

The young boy looks at the silent Red with fear and turns around in the end, running away.

It has always been like this. Always.

He used to it.

Even though that is what he tells himself, he still feels a sharp pain in his small chest.

The quiet night seems to be able to absorb all sound.

The customers of the circus have gone back home, there is no one left. The circus members are going to sleep very soon as well.

“Ah...!”

Red gave a cry and hid behind a tree.

Someone walked out of the circus tent, it was Cosmos.

I thought he already went to rest!

Cosmos looks drunk.

He was holding a beer bottle in one hand and walking unsteadily.

“Ah~hh, I really can't continue anymore!”

He does not greet anyone and walks to the member's tent while talking to himself.

He's not coming towards here. Red's heart is pounding as he watches Cosmos quietly.

“I'm...not supposed to stay here...because I have a noble bloodline...”

Cosmos, who was completely drunk, did not notice Red, who was hiding in the shadows of the trees, he simply continues walking unsteadily.

Red let out a sigh of relief and leaves the shadows of the trees.

Just like what the other members said. Cosmos will drink himself drunk every night, and complain non-stop.

--I'm not a person who should stay here

Cosmos' words echo.

This is not the place I belong to.

But, if you want to know where this place is, you are unable to find the answer.

All alone.

What am I doing in this sort of place? How long will I stay in a place like this?

His stomach growls.

W soup and bread would be nice.

Red feels that his situation is too tragic, and bites his lip.

He brushes the snow of himself and walks into the tent.

“!”

The prop box's contents, which had been arranged properly, are scattered all over, like a thief has been through it.

Red stares dumbfounded at the scattered props.

Before leaving the tent, he had already kept everything properly.

Members who have finished their work would not take the trouble to come back, they should be asleep now.

He could only think of one suspect.

--Cosmos.

The name appeared together with his anger.

It must be that drunkard.

In order to vent his dissatisfaction, he can do this sort of thing.

Even then, if he leaves it like this, he would still get scolded by the Ringmaster the next morning.

--time to check the props.

If it was to vent anger, it is very possible for props to be thrown away.

The Ringmaster only thinks about money. He always thought that giving salary to the members and buying props were unnecessary.

Even if one small ball was lost, he'll definitely lose his temper. Then throw all the blame onto Red , who does the odd jobs.

Red picks up the things scattered on the ground.

The five big balls are all there. The cigar box used for magic tricks, red, blue, yellow, two each—

Just at this moment.

A kacha sound is emitted from a wooden box.

It is box in the corner of the room, big enough to hold an adult.

--who is it, don't tell me Cosmos is hiding inside?!

An uncontrollable feeling of violence surges up inside him.

No wait, didn't I see him return just now?

Then, what is this-

Red watches the box warily—

A large form slowly walks out from the shadows.

“D, dog--?”

Discovering something which he didn't consider, caused Red to be very shocked.

A huge dog had come out from the box.

Tea coloured fur mixed in with white fur which looked really soft.

On its neck was not a collar but a clown ring.

Which means, this dog belongs to the circus.

Maybe because it's late at night, not only does it look sleepy, even its movements are dull.

So, it didn't notice.

The dog picked up a ball with a star pattern on the ground, and ran past Red , who was still in shock.

“Ah, wait!”

If one ball is missing, it would mean a lot of trouble.

Whose dog is it! Help me stop it!

Red runs after the dog in panic, out of the tent.

As Red ran through the snow, he felt as if he had seen that dog before.

Recently, a lot of new performers were hired. It should be the partner of one of the newcomers.

It should be a clown.

The circus is a gathering of wanderers.

It's a place where people of different backgrounds and different goals gather.

And because the Ringmaster is prone to mood swings, the turnover rate of the circus is high.

Because of this, Red cannot remember everyone's faces.

They are people who are going to leave anyway—

That dog walked towards the darkness.

He is unable to catch up with the dog which can run through the snow easily, so the distance between and the dog grew bigger and bigger.

“Ah!”

Red's foot sinks into the snow, causing him to fall over.

The cold sensation of the snow causes him to get up hurriedly.

If the prop is lost, I'll be beaten up again, and I will not get anything to eat again.

His cheeks throb.

“I'm telling you to wait!”

Red shouts.

The dog continues running single-mindedly, as if it did not hear the shouts.

In the darkness of the outdoors, he searches for the dog's footprints, but has stopped running.

He is at his limit.

“...”

Not only has he been hit, and kicked, his stomach is extremely empty well, there is also the freezing air and the snow which traps his feet.

He is unable to think about anything else.

Red collapses on to the snow, like he had turned limp.

And just like that, he flips over.

Red lies spread-eagled in the snow.

“Hah, hah!”

His rapid breathing could not slow down.

His heart is pounding furiously.

Snow falls onto Red .

His body is covered in white.

He's cold, and tired, and heart-broken, and suffering—

--he can't think of anything anymore.

PA!

“!!”

His face seems to be hit by something like a ball.

Red opens his eyes, and discovered that the dog that he should have lost was in front of him.

The dog seems to want to say something. It opens his mouth and pants.

“Wha, what?”

At this moment, the dog quickly stands up on its hind legs.

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Then shakes its head vigorously.

“Ah---”

The clown tag shakes together with the dog's movement.

In the midst of the heavy snow, the clown tag shines under the dim street lights. As it turns, it is as mystifying as the dances from another country.

Red stares dumbfounded at the sight.

Just then, the dog meets Red's eyes.

That expression is very playful—

This mutt—

He finally understands why the dog ran out.

That right, he wants to play.

No, it should be he wants to tease me.

Even if he knew that—

Red picks up the ball dropped on the ground, and threw it towards the dog.

Even though it was meant as a small joke, the dog jumped lightly and catches the ball perfectly in mid-air with its mouth.

The dog puts down the ball in its mouth.

"Take this!"

Red picks up the ball. This time, he throws it further and harder.

In the air where snowflakes are drifting, the star shaped ball leaves its perfect trajectory.

The dog ran across the ground like a typhoon and jumps towards the grey sky.

Just like it was dancing in the air, the dog catches the ball easily—Red is fascinated with such a scene.

He is very agitated.

The hatred and anger in the depths of his heart had melted—that was the feeling he had.

Red held onto that feeling, and threw the ball again and again.

The dog gracefully leapt through the air to grab the ball, as if it did not want to lose. This elation was a feeling he did not experience before.

Red couldn't help but shout and leap in joy.

I really want to stay on a stage like this.

When he came to his senses, the pain and hunger pangs have decreased greatly.

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The person doing odd jobs needs to wake up very early.

“Okay, Red. This is the last one.”

“...”

Red grumpily puts the bowl of soup and bread onto the trolley.

He just needs to send these to the Magician’s tent.

As long as he finishes this, then he can finally eat.

“Breakfast!”

“How slow!”

One of the performers glanced at Red expressionlessly.

“...Sorry.”

Breakfast is sent late because the performers are not popular.

Eating order is determined by popularity.

It looks like this performer’s patience is going to run out soon.

This fact would probably irritate him even more.

Red leaves the tent he just entered. He doesn’t want to be taken apart.

Even then, Cosmos still shouted at him this morning.

--Why am I not the first one? You bastard, you spoke about the previous incident, did you?

Red hurriedly ran away from the angry looking Cosmos.

If he got beaten up again, he wouldn’t be able to take it.

Red breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, he can eat his own meal in the corner of the kitchen.

“Hurry up and finish eating!”

The chef said these unkind words, like he did not want to see Red at all.

Because of Red’s ugly arm, a lot of people hate him.

He's used to such cold looks already. Red holds the bowl of soup.

His tightened stomach felt a bit warmer because of the soup.

Red quickly left the tent after finishing and distributing the food.

The person doing odd jobs has a lot of work.

I need to finish them quickly.

Red picks up the performer's clothes which have been drying at the corner of the tent. Using his immobile left hand to support the clothes, and using his right hand to tightly hug the bundle.

“Okay...”

All he has to do with bring these to the backstage and stack them piece by piece in an orderly manner. Because he's already used to it, he can quickly finish the job with only his right hand.

Sometimes, performers will walk past him.

But no one will talk to him.

Red will not talk to anyone as well.

Every day, in the backstage, he is used like a tool.

These sort of lonely jobs are also very common.

Common—

At that moment, someone nudges him from behind.

“!!!”

He turns around in shock, and saw the dog, with ragged breathing, behind him.

“...Huh, it's you again!”

Red gave a cold look at the mutt staring at him with a wet nose.

Maybe it was satisfied with the reply, the dog sat down next to Red.

After that snowy night, the dog will always pick the times when Red is alone to be next to him.

Red ignored the dog, and turned his back on it to fold the clothes.

The dog stayed next to him quietly.

He can feel the dog breathing behind him, and sometimes, it was very clear that it had yawned.

Who's going to turn back?

Red continued to sit with his back to the dog.

And simply continued with his work.

Quietly, he wanted to suppress his feelings.

Actually—really, he wants to pat it.

He wants to play with the dog.

He wants to be really close to it.

The elation he felt that snowy night, replayed itself in his mind over and over again.

It was the first time since he came to the circus.

That he can feel happy from the bottom of his heart.

But—

“Strange? What happened to that acrobat? (The one who balances on the ball)

“Ohh, that one? He resigned yesterday.”

“Is it? He should have said something—whatever, it doesn’t matter much anyway.”

Hearing the conversation of the performers walking past him, Red clenches his teeth.

It is difficult to tell when the performers will leave one after another.

The dog’s owner will leave one day, and go to another place.

That means that he would not be able to see the dog again.

Red could not tolerate it anymore, and stole a backward glance at the dog.

The dog’s good senses picked that up and shook its head.

This pitiful action, made Red feel very warm inside.

Something warm gushes out from the depths of his soul.

Red stops the hand folding the clothes, then clenches his fist, looking away from the dog.

I can’t get close to him.

Definitely not.

The presence of the dog behind him pains him, Red thought of it that way.

This dog will leave me soon, together with its owner.

If I accept it, it will be especially painful when we say goodbye.

It would definitely be as painful as stabbing a knife through his chest, an unimaginable pain.

It may also be as painful as swallowing a rock.

No matter what, it will only increase the feelings of loneliness.

Once he thinks about this, it feels like he fell into a deep chasm.

So I will turn my back to it.

Red concentrates on his job once more.

Red does not talk to it, does not pat it, and even more, did not pay attention to it at all—

Even then—

The dog keeps loitering behind him.

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“Ka!” Red’s face comes into contact with hard object. It’s a ball used in transformation magic.

“Ow...”

He bears the pain and lifts up his head, only to come into eye contact with Cosmos, who is filled with nastiness.

“Drat, it’s because the ball slipped from my hand! Having been touched by such a dirty hand, the ball is really dirty! If the stunt fails because of this, then it is definitely your fault.”

“...”

He meticulously polishes the props every day. But, not just Cosmos, many others like to blame Red.

If things cannot be performed properly by the person, the props are blamed.

They’re so shameless.

It’s too much.

Red stares disgustedly at Cosmos, whose back is facing him. He had taken off his wig and thrown it on the floor.

Even though Cosmos often finds faults with Red, Cosmos is in a very bad mood these few days.

Because a clown more popular than Cosmos has appeared.

That would be the dog’s owner.

All of the clown's techniques are well executed; his amusement tactics are unique; and the special canine partner, both of them are very popular.

His popularity continues to increase. Now, there is a rumour that many returning customers specially come to watch his show.

"It looks like Cosmos may not be able to snatch his No. 1 spot back."

He remembered that someone has whispered this sentence before—

"Oi!"

The low, angry voice, made Red jump.

It came from Cosmos, who had stuck his head in through the Circus' curtains.

And I thought he had gone outside already.

His heart beats furiously.

He's going to get badly beaten up again.

"I have something to talk about with a useless fellow like you. Hurry up and come!"

Red stands up slowly.

He wanted to reject Cosmos, but if Red did not listen, he will be on the receiving end of more violent beatings.

With no abilities, a left arm which cannot move.

No one will protect a troublesome person like Red.

Red can only surrender to the flow of events.

Cosmos grabbed Red's arm and dragged him to the small pocket of trees outside.

After removing the wig, Cosmos' golden hair drapes around his face, giving off an even more disgusting feeling.

"Oi, you seem really close to that dog, right!"

"D,dog...?"

For a short moment, Red did not know what Cosmos was talking about. But after a while, he realised that Cosmos was referring to the dog which kept following him.

"I'm referring to that smelly dog with a collar around its neck. Listen, you must not tell anyone!"

Cosmos lowers his volume and whispers next to Red's ear.

Then, he shoves a small bag to Red.

Even though he was very reluctant, but Red accepts it anyway.

"What, is this...."

Touching it lightly, he realises that it's hard.

With a very bad feeling, Red looks into the bag and gasps in shock.

There was a lot of crushed glass in the bag.

Reflected in Cosmos' light blue eyes was the expression of cruelty.

"Mix these things into the dog's food."

For a while, Red does not understand the implications behind the statement.

"Eh, ehh? If I did that—"

Red got slapped, hard.

Cosmos started to shout at Red, who was stunned by the blow.

"No nonsense from you! It'll be fine as long as you do as I say. Unless brat!"

His face, which was hit, hurt a lot.

Then, Cosmos' statements started circulating in his head.

The dog, whose tag kept spinning, in the heavy snow.

The dog, which will use its nose to nudge his back when he's stacking the clothes.

The dog, which will quietly follow him when he's moving props.

"...I won't!"

He says it easily.

"Hah?"

"I won't do this sort of thing!"

Red throws the bag back to Cosmos.

The bag full of glass, lands at Cosmos' feet with a crack.

Cosmos runs a hand through his hair, and breathes in impatiently.

Then he takes a big step forward.

His light blue eyes giving off a fierce look, Cosmos brutally gives a kick in Red's direction.

After that, was a flurry of kicks.

Red collapses with a groan.

Chest, stomach, leg—

His body is in so much pain that it feels like it's falling apart, but the blows keep coming.

But Red continues clenching his teeth.

He will never say "Yes"—even if he was killed.

He swore to himself.

His vision starts to blur.

Ah, am I going to die—

Just as he loses consciousness, he hears a dog barking.

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“Urgh...”

Red gets up slowly. Suddenly, pain courses through his body.

Slowly, he becomes more alert.

“Ah...”

Red remembers.

Cosmos took him outdoors, told him to feed glass to the dog, then because Red refused, he got violently beaten up—but it feels like he had heard a dog barking...

What he heard before he lost consciousness should not be that dog’s barking.

Red felt a chill go down his spine.

He had—a bad feeling.

What if, it came to save him.

If that was the case.

Cosmos wants to kill that dog. It’s possible that something had been done already.

The sun had already set, and the surroundings are getting dark.

Red stands up slowly and shakily made his way back to the Circus.

After entering the tent, he crossed the backstage to glance at the stage.

“Ah--”

He felt extremely relieved.

The dog’s performing on the stage with its owner.

Leaping to catch the ball, the tag turning round and round—

Red breathed a sigh of relief seeing its energetic self.

And I thought Cosmos had done something to it, it looks fine.

The bark that he heard before he lost consciousness must be an illusion.

Maybe it was because he felt relieved, Red, who displayed no interest in the performances before, stood quietly by the curtains watching the stage.

The dog’s owner took a cup out from the box and swung the cup around in an amusing manner.

Then threw it towards the dog.

But, the dog turned in the other direction with a ‘humph’, as if it was ignoring him.

The dog’s owner shrugged his shoulders, and—stuck both his hands on his face.

This hilarious look caused some outburst amongst the audience.

The dog’s owner then took the ball with the star shaped pattern.

“Ah...”

Red exclaimed to himself as the memories of that snowy night resurfaced.

The dog caught the ball which the owner threw very gracefully.

Loud claps ensued as the audience saw how experienced the dog was when it caught the ball.

The dog’s owner was indeed more popular than Cosmos, his tricks were varied and exquisite.

Sometimes hilarious, other times elegant and showy.

The audiences’ eyes were always filled with light; they laughed till they fell over, and they wouldn’t stop clapping.

He was able to transform the rowdy audience into one entity.

Everyone was absorbed with his performance.

Being able to perform with such an owner must be a very happy thing.

The dog performed, full of life.

It was so bright.

The clown, and the dog—

Red couldn’t help but squint.

It was too bright.

The customers and the dog, they loved the clown on the stage.

It was an incomprehensible feeling.

Love, and being loved—this had nothing to do with him.

He would not love anyone, and no one would love him.

Even though it was right in front to him, it needed to be treated like something that happens in a land far away.

“Urgh...”

Something warm is rising up in his chest.

Red tries to keep it down.

Possessing an ugly arm, abandoned by his parents, isolated by others in the circus, and having to worry about violence every day.

One day, there was a dog.

There was a dog.

At my side where no one would approach, there was a dog.

Until the day, I always thought it was okay to be alone.

But it's not like that—

I was only forcing myself. If I did not do that, I would not be able to live on.

The situation happening in front of me, part of a bright world—is that “love”?

If it is like that—then I want to obtain “love”

I envy those with “love”. I am too lonely, too miserable.

Even though it's just right in front of me, I can't touch it.

I am unable to obtain it.

When I realised it.

My face was covered in tears...

After the performance, the clown and dog returned to the backstage.

“Bark!”

The dog discovers Red, and bounds towards him happily.

Thump thump, his heart is pounding.

What, what should I do? What should I—

Many emotions are swirling in his heart.

The image of the brightness of the dog and the clown on stage, surfaced in Red's mind.

“Shoo, go away!”

Red kicks hard, and sends the dog flying.

Bark! The dog whimpering and falls on the floor.

“Ah--”

Red is stunned.

I, I didn't want—to do this sort of thing...

He quickly runs away from the place.

He just kept running and running, unable to control his sad emotions.

So envious.

So jealous—

He did not know what to do anymore.

Red, who was confused, did not realise that he had just brushed past Cosmos.

He also did not realise that Cosmos was currently rubbing his leg, which had been bitten by a dog, with a vengeful look.

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Ever since that day, the dog never returned to Red's side.

It was expected, because he suddenly sent it flying.

But he did not feel any pain.

In fact, he thought it was better that way.

Because he did not want to see them.

Just hurry up and go to another place, stay out of my sight.

This circus is just a temporary stop.

The performers will appear before disappearing one after another.

Because it's all temporary, so there cannot be any expectations.

It will only cause pain.

Therefore, do not get attached to others, and do not let others get attached to me.

But—something aches in heart.

“Red, I'm going out to buy something, come with me as well!”

“Yes!”

Red was called out by the chef, into the streets.

The streets are filled with Christmas decorations, it was very lively outside.

In the more prosperous stores lining the road, there were many customers. There were also many roadside stalls, trying to promote their wares.

Everyone is looking at presents happily.

Children circle innocently around their parents.

All of this feels a world away.

The chef would not talk to him as well.

Red walks on the prosperous streets silently.

In this place, he could feel the difference between him and the happy people.

I am—very lonely.

But, it isn't that bad.

It's fine like this.

After shopping, he put the mountain of bread, meat, vegetables, wine and other things onto the trolley and pushed it back to the circus. He sees the dog sleeping beside the heater.

Normally, just before the performance, it would always be practicing together with its owner.

What's wrong, is it not feeling well?

Red hesitates in approaching the dog.

He remembered that he had sent the dog flying.

I did something really horrible to it.

It's still a better decision not to get myself involved.

But—

He slowly approaches the dog, still feeling hesitant.

The dog is lying on its side, with no energy in its limbs.

The coat covering the dog must belong to its owner. Even though the coat is really old, once you look closely, it's actually of high quality.

The dog's chest rises and falls.

The dog, which is breathing deeply as it sleeps, now looks older than he imagined.

And very weak as well.

Red stretches his arm towards the dog, he is worried.

--it's okay if I just touch it a bit, right?

But I could be hated already.

Even though he felt uneasy, but he still reached out regardless.

He nervously touched the dog's body.

The dog did not move.

Slowly stroking its body, the dog suddenly opened its eyes.

“Ah...”

I must have woken it up.

Seeing Red standing there, the dog got up quickly.

Watching Red's face, it quickly used its back legs to stand up, panting as it did then. Then, it collapsed on the floor.

It must want to perform tricks for him.

The dog rolls around listlessly.

Red continuously rubs the body of the dog, which had fallen down once again.

He wants to make up for sending it flying.

Can this intent reach—

The dog looks comfortable, and licks Red's hand.

It licked the hand which everyone was disgusted with, the left hand.

Red felt all warm inside.

Like he had been forgiven.

He strokes the dog again.

“If you're healthy again, if you get well, if-- ”

He said it naturally.

It was almost like a prayer.

Red concentrates on stroking the dog.

Then, there was a taste of sunlight.

The dog which was being stroked quietly.

It was as if time had stopped between them.

Just then, the bell announcing the start of the performance rings.

The dog's ears perked up instantly.

It got up quickly and ran to its owner's side.

Seeing it like that, Red breathes a sign of relief.

Maybe it was just a little tired...

He holds his hand tenderly.

If it's possible, he would want to touch it more.

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It was still snowing heavy up till yesterday, but today, there were no clouds in the sky.

“Ah...”

Red, who had finished washing the clothes, discovered the dog's owner sitting by himself under a tree near the tent.

It's Christmas Day today. The performers have all gone out to the street to publicise their performance.

The man in the clown suit did not move at all, just like a puppet which had lost its strings.

The man just silently stared at the ground in front of him.

--What is he doing?

If he's just resting, then this scene is weird.

But, it has nothing to do with me.

Red will not approach the performers on his own, because they will think Red is disgusting, and ignore him, or order him around like a servant.

But no matter what, he is still concerned.

He is the person who is partnered with the dog.

What kind of person is he?

Red moves closer to the man.

"--!"

He almost stopped breathing.

In the man's line of sight is a hole—the dog is lying in it.

"Is it dead?"

The man stared at Red, with a rather shocked expression.

From the clown's makeup, he can see that his eyes are a deep gold colour.

"It's dead."

The man replied, loneliness evident in his voice.

Then, he started to pile soil on top of the dog.

Red watches all of this quietly.

"...those are all bruises!"

Even under the fur, it can be seen that the dog is covered in bruises that would make anyone wince.

It spoke plainly about how the dog met its end.

--there was only one possibility.

Cosmos.

That guy killed it. A boiling anger surged forth.

Endlessly churning, boiling vigorously.

"It was definitely done by that guy Cosmos. Because, you're more popular than he is. As long as someone is more popular than him, he would not let it go. His performance skills are obviously bad, but he's good at doing these things!"

Red started to say without pause, as if he had been possessed.

Compared to the agitated Red, the man replied blandly.

"It had been with me for a very long time, so it wouldn't have much time left anyway. Forget it."

“...”

The dog's body is now totally buried in the soil; the man gently put the ball with the star pattern on the ground, just like a gravestone.

--Forget it.

Hearing this, Red realises that he is very disappointed.

Why, isn't he angry? Why doesn't he hate Cosmos?

The fury he felt burned more strongly than before. Red, who can't do anything, found himself unable to divert any of these feelings.

“Then you're not taking revenge?”

“If I did that, I'll be chased out by the Ringmaster, which would mean that whatever I did before would be wasted.”

After saying that, the man put his palms together in front of the grave.

--Che.

What is this.

His partner had been murdered!

How can he be so calm?

Even I hate Cosmos this much already.

At least he should mention something about revenge, right?

Opposite from what Red was feeling at this moment, the man is very calm.

“I'm an outsider anyway. I'll be leaving for another place after Christmas tomorrow...”

“I see.”

Behind his peaceful answer, Red's emotions are in turmoil.

He totally regretted it.

To be touched by the performance of such a person, he's really an idiot.

The man who would not even shed a tear, it's too much.

The dog's owner is actually this sort of person.

He really wants to leave quickly.

But he is unable to look away from the dog's grave.

"Hmm?"

The man only looks at Red now.

"Then again, who are you?"

"I'm the one doing odd jobs here...I bought your meals before."

"I'm not good at remembering faces. Ah, now that I've looked closely, aren't you covered in bruises too?!"

The man licked his own finger and rubbed it against Red's face.

Facing this sort of unexpected action, Red dodges.

"Wah! It's gross! Don't use your saliva, idiot!"

"It's antiseptic. Were you hit by Cosmos too?"

"You're irritating!"

Even though that was the case, he did not want to admit it.

"Do you have friends?"

"You're irritating!!"

Red shouts.

"This sort of place...I definitely leave once I grow up, so friends or whatever, I don't need them!"

He remembers the boy's expression, who had run away after seeing his left arm.

A terrified and disgusted expression.

I don't need friends or anything like that—

Red is shocked.

The man used both his hands—and squeezed his face.

"What the heck are you doing!"

"You don't have any energy?"

The man asks, surprised.

Red has no idea what he's talking about.

It was infuriating.

Then, he recalled that the man used that gesture to create an outburst of laughter amongst the audience.

“I’m sorry, I don’t like clowns. In fact, I dislike them?”

“Aiyaya!”

The man smiles.

“I dislike audience and children who don’t laugh as well!”

“Hmph!”

Red just stares at the dog’s grave. As he thought, since he couldn’t understand, so he can’t leave.

“You...why aren’t you crying? You lived with this guy. It’s not possible not to feel sadness?

When he realised it, the clown was not around anymore.

“?”

As he turned, he found that the man had used a rope to hang himself off the nearby tree.

“I’m so sad I could die.”

“Stop it!”

It could be an act, such a scary feeling.

I have a feeling, this guy, doesn’t feel right...?

“You see, I, can’t cry.”

The man removed the rope from his neck, and explains blandly.

“Maybe it’s already dry. No tears can come out.”

“What kind of explanation is that!”

This person is hard to comprehend.

Red’s attention returns to the grave.

Then again—

“This guy, what’s its name?”

The clown is silent.

“I touched it yesterday, and it licked me, it felt so warm!”

That dog which licked him happily.

That dog did not care about my ugly hand at all.

“So today, I also...”

The words are at the tip of his tongue, his whole body is shaking, tears fall without warning.

I also wanted to pat it today. Like, do your best today as well.

“Why, only having this sort of relationship with it, why am I crying...!”

He can't hold it in anymore.

Red lets out all the feelings that he kept in.

“Wahhh-----!!”

This is the first time he cried out loud.

The tears flowing down his cheeks feel hot.

“I see.”

The man watches Red, who is crying.

“You're Allen's friend.”

--Friend.

This word kept circling around in his mind.

That dog was actually named Allen.

I—have never called that name before.

He recalls the warmth when he stroked the dog.

He wanted to call out its name.

He wanted to be close to it.

Red cried until he was exhausted, and even fell asleep. And the man, just like a puppet with broken strings, just sat next to him.

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“Urm...”

A comfortable swaying—

Red wakes up from a peaceful nap.

How warm...

What, is this...

“Ah!”

Red realises that he's being carried by the Clown.

He also knows how red his face is.

“Put, put me down!”

As Red said so, the Clown smiles while his body bobs up and down, walking lightly. It wasn't long before they returned to the tent.

The Clown put Red next to the heater.

“What, what are you doing...”

Even after Red asked, the man does not reply. Not just that, his legs are shaking, like they have been frozen.

“What? Are you cold?”

The man takes out his own coat puts it around him, his expression warms up and he smiles slightly.

“...? You want to say that you're warmer?...You think you're acting a mime performance?!”

Then, the man wraps his coat around Red.

It was the coat which covered the dog yesterday.

It's warm...

A smell just like the sun wafts out. That guy's smell...

The temperature of the coat, caused him to remember the dog's warmth. Tears well up, this time, a silk cap was pushed on him.

The silk cap is slightly larger than Red head, and soft.

“Wait, what are you doing, really?!”

The Clown smiled as usual, after that, the Clown passes over the circus' flyer.

\*\*\*

The streets on Christmas are more lively than before.

The street lights are decorated and people are outdoors, carrying the goods needed for Christmas celebrations.

The smell of meat and bread mixes together with the noisy crowd.

Cheerful cries are heard.

Surrounded by the excitement, Red and the man walk along the streets.

The performers are showing off their skills in the open area.

Red, who was forced to follow, passes out flyers next to the performing Clown.

“...Why do I have to do these sort of things...whatever, I’m supposed to do odd jobs anyway.”

Even though he is not used to being in public, but the coat which the Clown gave him covers up with ugly left arm, so he ignores the stares which others people are giving.

“Wah, look quickly!”

“It’s a clown!”

“It’s great, so vibrant!”

The people who were passing by stopped in their tracks, and smiled at the clown’s performance.

Red, who was standing nearby, had to admit.

This man’s performance has to be the best one so far.

A crying boy approaches.

Even with his mother trying to comfort him, the boy does not stop crying.

The clown gracefully appears in front of the boy.

Then he smiles, pulling a balloon out from his sleeve. Then he inflates the balloon and ties a knot.

What he made was a balloon dog.

The clown passes the balloon to the boy, the boy stopped sniffling and his face is radiant.

It’s perfect.

The children around the clown quickly gathered around him.

“I want one too, I want one too~”

“Me too~!”

The clown is surrounded by smiling children.

Red glances over at the clown while distributing the fliers, and the clown turned in his direction.

“What, what is it?”

The clown did a funny action, first walking around with a spring in his step, then doing a handstand, with just one hand.

The people who were watching clapped.

The clown turned once before standing up again, then danced around in circles.

“Wa..wah!”

Then suddenly spread out his arms and used two fingers to point at Red.

Yes, like he meant “He’s up next”

The surrounding audience watched Red expectantly.

“Eh? Ehh?”

Red, who was suddenly pointed out, is stunned.

Seeing his stunned state, the clown tilted his head and shrugged his shoulders, as if he can’t help it.

Seeing this action, the audience laughed as well.

They thought he had no courage—

Red, competitive by nature, flares up.

I’ll do it, just you see!

Red puts the fliers aside, and stepped on the ground.

The scenery went by in a circle.

A flip in the air. He’s still confident on the nimbleness of his body.

After landing lightly on the ground like a cat, the audience clapped and cheered.

The clown crossed his arms, like he’s considering something.

Then he snaps his fingers.

He gently lifts up one leg and on tip-toe, slowly turned one round.

This amusing ballet move caused the audience to laugh.

If it like that, I'll do it too.

"Everyone stand back please!"

After saying so, Red did a little jog and with a push of his arm, executed a somersault, and jumped back up again lightly.

This showy move attracted more applause and cheers.

The clown then pretended he was so shocked that he fell over, which bought about more laughter.

The clown got up slowly, and smiled at Red. And Red also had a smile on his face, although he did not know when it happened.

They bowed deeply to the audience and loud claps could be heard around them.

Being clapped for, and making people happy, this was the first time it has happened.

The clown passed the silk cap over.

Red held the cap out and some of the audience threw coins in.

My skills were recognised?

Red started to blush—

"Kid, what's your name?"

Turning around, he sees a man wearing a coat on top of his black priest clothing.

The silver cross on his chest is shining.

He was a big man, Red raises his head, feeling rather nervous. The man puts money into his cap, and watches him.

His eyes were sharp—like they can see through everything.

Even though he's wearing priest robes, the man gives off a scary threatening aura.

Red is shocked, and stares dumbly at the man.

His deep red hair, the colour of blood, and covering half his face, is tied in a ponytail,

The man's stare seems to stick onto his body, and feels cold.

"Didn't you hear me? Your name."

This pressuring sentence caused Red to jolt.

I don't have a name. Telling himself that, Red ignores the red haired man.

"Oi!"

He acts like he did not hear the man's voice and continues to give out flyers while saying promotional statements.

"You're called Allen?"

"No!"

He mumbled, giving a negative.

He actually said I'm Allen? What is this man saying.

Red glanced at this man.

Allen is the dog's—

"Not a dog."

The man replies like he can see through Red's thoughts.

"...Hah?"

"...If that's not your name then forget it, listen up, brat, don't get too close to Mana."

The red haired man says before disappearing amongst the crowd.

What is up with that...

The man is different from all the people he had seen so far.

What kind of person is he?

Red watches the man leave, his heart pounding.

After he had distributed all the fliers, Red sees the clown.

"Mana...?"

"Hmm?"

The clown reacts to Red's words.

"Mana?"

He asks the clown. The clown nods.

"Hmm?"

“Are you called Mana?”

“Yes.”

Thinking about it, Red finds out that he does not know the clown’s name yet.

“How did you know my name?”

“Just now, a strange man with red hair wearing priest robes spoke with me. That guy told me ‘Don’t get close to Mana’--”

After saying that, Mana’s expression became weird.

It was Red’s first time seeing his serious expression, and felt a little shocked.

Then he suddenly ran off.

“Mana?!”

Red follows in panic.

“Mana, what’s wrong?”

“I need to find that person!”

Mana looks around frantically.

But there was no trace of the red haired man in priest robes.

“Mana, he can’t be found anymore!”

Mana does not listen to Red’s words at all.

So he runs around the streets aimlessly, with no results.

The sun had already set.

The circus performance is going to start soon, it’s time to return.

Mana’s shoulders slump in disappointment.

“...Why do you spend so much effort looking for him, do you know him?”

After Red asked the question, Mana replies with loneliness.

“That could be my little brother.”

“Little brother...?”

Mana, not giving up, continued to search through the crowd.

He steps forward shakily.

"Ah, wait!"

Mana is still focused on searching the crowd.

Red's voice did not reach him.

Just then, a horse carriage rushes towards them.

Within a split second, Red pushes Mana into a nearby drain.

"Wah...be careful!"

"..."

"You almost died!"

Even though Mana was reprimanded by Red, his eyes never leave the crowd.

"Seriously, I can't handle you."

Red brings him to a park nearby to wash off the dirt acquired when they fell into the drain.

Mana also removed his clown makeup and took off his wig.

Red couldn't help but stare at Mana's face.

This was his first time seeing Mana's real face.

A sharp nose, and a face with wrinkles which showed his age.

And the feature which leaves the biggest impression, a pair of bright gold eyes.

Mana meets Red's stare.

Being stared by Red so much will still make him feel embarrassed, Mana turns away.

"Really, you need to be more careful. You, if I didn't save you, you would have died!"

"Death is really such a dislikeable thing!"

Mana said, laughing.

"So, you have to be more careful!"

"I guess you're right, I apologise. Ahh, today's weather is really good!"

"...what does this matter have to do with weather?"

“The evening sun during this sort of day is the most beautiful.”

“As—I—said, I wasn’t talking about that, I want you to be more careful! I know you’re worried about your brother, but!”

Seeing Red looking rather miffed, Mana smiles slightly.

“You know, I’m only seventeen.”

“Hah?”

Mana looks like a middle aged man no matter how you looked at him.

It could be that Mana sensed what Red was thinking, he smiles, looking rather troubled.

“When I woke up one morning, I realised that I have became a middle aged man. I don’t know the reason at all. But, I was a seventeen year old youth the day before. At the beginning, when I saw my own face in the mirror, I was really shocked!”

Red directed a weird look at Mana, who had suddenly said something weird.

So he really is a rather weird—no, really weird person.

“Even then, after I stared at my looks for a while, I still managed to calm down, then I felt something was strange.”

Red just listens silently without saying anything. Mana felt that Red must be waiting for him to continue, so he continues speaking.

“I have a little brother, but he is nowhere to be found.”

Mana quietly leans towards Red.

“I will say this to you only...”

He moves his face closer to Red’s ear and whispers.

“I am being chased. If I get caught, I’ll definitely be killed.”

“By whom?”

“I think it’s someone called the Millennium Earl, he is a person who can turn humans in AKUMA. Because there are AKUMA everywhere, you’ll need to stay alert.”

Then Mana places a finger over his lips.

This action definitely belongs to a child, this sort of behaviour does not suit him.

Red feels that this person is not just abnormal, he could be suffering from some illness.

"My brother must have been separated from me. I must find him. Because if I have turned into this sort of middle aged man, even if he sees me, he won't recognise me. I need to go and find him...so I need to be alone, and begin my life of wandering."

"Is that so?"

Red, who had been silent the whole time, speaks.

"Your little brother could have abandoned you."

He says this subconsciously.

After the sentence left his mouth, Red is shocked at himself.

"If, if it's true, what do you plan to do..."

Because of the ugly left arm, you were sold to the circus.

That was what he heard from the Ringmaster.

Being pulled into the circus for an unknown reason, and constantly bullied after that.

Being loathed because of his hideous left arm.

The members who treated him like he's an object.

It only left disgusting memories.

So he shields away from any relationships that have to do with him.

Because I have been hated by everyone.

Even my parents—abandoned me.

But even a person like me, still had a dog to keep me company. But, it was killed.

The feeling of happiness only stayed for a while.

The painful memories up till now resurfaced in an instant, and it showed in his choice of words.

Red knew what was true sadness and Mana just watched the sky quietly.

The sky was dyed beautifully by the evening sun.

The mix of red and orange, reflected in the snow on the ground, is very dazzling. The rays of the sun lit up the plants, trees and people, changing slowly.

"How beautiful!"

Mana praises.

“I love beautiful worlds the best.”

Mana says, yet he looks like he had cried.

\*\*\*

The time for the performance is nearing. When they returned from the streets, they found a large crowd.

Perhaps it was to get good seats, everyone arrived early.

Entering the circus tent, Red is shocked.

He realises that Cosmos is waiting there.

He is wearing the clown getup, his arms crossed, smiling to himself.

The peace obtained from the time he spent with Mana disappeared without a trace.

This bastard—it was this bastard who killed Allen.

Yet Cosmos is still looking around happily.

“What happened to your partner?”

Mana tilts his head.

“...Who, are you? I’m, not very good at remembering faces...”

Cosmos expression distorts suddenly

“~~~~~?! I’m Cosmos!”

“If many customers come today, it’ll be really great~~~”

Saying that, Mana walks away and disappears to the other side of the canvas.

His steps are light, giving people the impression that he had forgotten his dog’s death.

...Mana may think it’s alright, but I will not think that way.

Red glares at Cosmos.

“...You killed it, didn’t you?”

“Hah?”

Cosmos looks at Red.

“The dog’s dead. It’s body full of wounds. The only person who would do it is you!”

"Of course that's impossible! Calm down, Red. Haha—hmm, that's right, that's right. Hey—everyone! Let's hear what Red just said!"

Hearing the commotion, the other circus members came over.

Cosmos surveys his surroundings with a smile.

"It looks like that cute dog is dead. And, it was Red who killed it."

"Wha...!"

Hearing Cosmos words, Red sucked in a breath of cold air.

"You were performing some tricks with that clown during the day, weren't you? You may have felt that that dog was in the way, so you killed it to be its replacement!"

"How could I have done that!"

When he was about to say—that it was rubbish, Red felt it.

The other members are giving him cold stares.

He also knows that he is shaking.

--In this place, I'm just a burden. No one would believe me.

His feelings of rage have reached his limit.

"Arghhh!"

He picks up a nearby plank and swings it at Cosmos with all of his strength.

But he can only use one hand, and a scrawny child cannot release that much power.

"Ugh!"

Red sighs in irritation, and Cosmos shouts exaggeratedly while holding his shoulder.

"AHHHH!"

Hearing the sound, the Ringmaster rushes over.

"What's wrong, Cosmos!"

Cosmos jumps towards the Ringmaster's stomach, saying.

"That bastard, actually used a plank to hit me! Argh...my hand..."

The Ringmaster glares at Red with fury in his eyes, and used the plank, which had dropped on the ground, to hit him.

“Ah!”

Then he repeatedly used the plank to beat up Red, who had fallen on the ground.

He did it until the plank broke, and angrily threw the broken part at Red.

“You, you bastard...you’re just a useless person!”

He glares at Red on the ground, vein popping.

Anger had caused his fat body to shake.

“I can’t tolerate it anymore. Throw him into the animal cage!”

The Ringmaster speaks like he’s going to abandon Red. Red can tell.

--He didn’t even ask for the reason.

To everyone, the truth is not important at all.

For matters concerning me, to everyone—

A boiling anger overflows.

“Okay, come here!”

The Ringmaster reaches out, like he wants to grab him. But Red escapes easily and rushes at Cosmos again.

Anger had caused the scene in front of him to turn red.

Whatever it is, I don’t care.

He just felt that this cannot be forgiven.

He remembers the dog’s corpse, covered in bruises.

Allen jumping around energetically. Always following behind him. And he would even lick the left hand that everyone is disgusted with.

At least, let me take revenge for him.

Even though I’m not his owner.

Even though I’ve only been contact with it for a short time.

But it dying just like that, it definitely cannot be ignored.

If reasons can be said, there are simply too many!

Red silently glanced at his blood red left arm.

Even though this ugly left arm can barely move, but it is as heavy and as hard as lead.

If it's this—

Red jumps up with all his might.

Twisting his body in his air, he adds a flip.

Then he swings his left arm towards Cosmos' skull.

He put all the power into his left arm.

He wants to kill him.

With a loud noise, the hard objects collided—

Light shards shine in the air.

“Ah---”

The shining shards attracted Red's attention, he was shocked.

The person who collapsed was not Cosmos, but Mana.

Mana, who should have gone to the stage, had returned, and even rushed out to protect Cosmos.

“Mana!”

The light shards slowly disappeared on Mana's head.

“No...you can't kill him...”

Blood started to flow from Mana's head.

“You can't do something that tragic...”

At this time, Mana is still smiling.

His face is now dyed red with blood, with Mana smiling, it's like he is shedding blood red tears.

“Why...”

He cannot understand.

I need to talk some sense into this bastard.

Even though his dog died, he still can smile so stupidly and even protected the murderer!

Red turns angrily towards Mana.

"Why must you be so calm! Why must you protect a bastard like Cosmos!"

Red is sitting on Mana and used his left arm to hit him again.

"Ah..."

For an instant, Mana's eyes lose his focus.

But he regains his smile quickly.

"Don't smile! Don't smile anymore!"

Red hits Mana again. Again and again—

Every time he swings his red arm, light shards will dance around together with the blood flowing out of Mana's head

He can't move his hand anymore.

"Thank you...for making my friend so happy..."

That was what he heard.

Why, why, why.

He couldn't think anymore. He's just, just saying what he believed in.

His body is getting heavier.

Mana gently placed his hand on Red's head.

"Allen is...a very lonely dog in the circus. In the beginning...he didn't know any tricks, and was treated as a burden...at that time, he was probably...very lonely."

"What, that is..."

Isn't that just like me—did that dog actually notice?

"After meeting you, Allen was very happy..."

Mana stretched out his hand shakily.

"But, don't spread the tragedy anymore..."

"Mana...?"

Red watches Mana.

“Tragedy...tra,gedy, is...”

Something is not right about him.

Mana is like a broken puppet, with broken speech.

His expression is rather blank.

It felt like something important had broken when he spoke—

Red is trapped by a scary thought—

That's right, I...used this left hand to hit him many times.

Mana is covered in blood.

His head, unbelievably, is scattered with light shards.

“Red! Stop it right now!”

Hearing the Ringmaster's voice, Red is jolted back to reality.

Two circus members heard the Ringmaster's orders. They grabbed him and pulled him away forcefully.

The Ringmaster shouted orders as he left the tent.

“No! Mana! Mana...!”

He keeps his eyes on Mana as he is dragged away.

“Bring him to the animal cage!”

As Red was being bought out, Mana slowly opens his mouth.

“Tra...gedy...”

Followed by laughter.

“Will...attract...the Earl.”

Cheers from the audience could be heard from the stage which should not have been opened yet.

Cosmos, as well as the other performers who had been watching the commotion caused by Red, turned towards the stage.

Continuous clapping and cheering could be heard.

The wind blows the curtains apart and the performers can now see what was happening on stage.

There were countless number of audiences and on the stage was a fat gentleman.

Sharp ears, large mouth and wearing a tall silk hat.

“Who is that guy...”

Cosmos takes a step forward.

“The first act should be done by me. I will to chase him out!”

Saying that, he ran out.

The gentleman used a cane adorned with a small pumpkin to tap on the ground, and bowed to the audience once he was done.

Following that, the audience in the stand turned into something short and fat. It looked like something out of this world, and was very terrifying.

“Wahhh!!”

The members screamed.

Mana, who had collapsed backstage, opened his eyes—and saw what was happening.

“Ah...”

The gentleman made eye contact with Mana, who was shaking due to fear, and smiled.

“...Ea, Earl...”

The customers, who had turned into monsters, shot blood bullets one after another.

On one side of the stage, the members collapsed as star shaped bruises appeared on them.

At this time, the red haired priest appeared in the circus tent.

“Che...as I suspected?

The man took out a gun with a intricate design, and said softly.

“Destroy them, Judgment!”

\*\*\*

The sky had turned dark. After entering the storage, Red was pushed in front of the animal cage.

The two members kept a strong hold on Red, who had no more energy to resist.

From the cage, the sounds of the fierce carnivores can be heard.

Not only was it angry from being kept in such a small cage, the commotion also made it more agitated than usual.

The air smells bad, like rotting fish.

If he entered the cage, he'll be bitten to death for sure.

--Death?

In this sort of place?

Because of that insignificant person?

Then, what was I born for?

Red's body started moving, partly from anger, as well as fear.

What is my purpose for existing?

Is it only to be killed, just like that?

He hears the cheers coming from the circus.

It is such a faraway reality now.

“Okay, get in!”

The Ringmaster's cold voice shouts.

Red's small body was easily thrown into the cage.

It is dark inside the cage.

But he could see the overwhelmingly large silhouette of the beast.

It's tea coloured fur is swaying.

“Ah--”

Growl---

He hears the low roar from beside him.

--There's no more hope.

Just as the beast opens its mouth, something breaks the cage and enters.

It was a yellow round object, and it seems to have wings as well.

“Rawl!”

The beast let out a cry, and collapses, just like that.

“Wha--”

Red stared at the unbelievable change in events.

What just happened?

He stands up shakily. The thing with the yellow wings chewed through the metal bars, flew around the cage once and exited it.

Red leaves the cage, feeling nervous.

“--!”

The Ringmaster and the two members are on the ground.

Beside them was the red haired priest he had met during the day.

He seemed to be the one who finished them off.

“Why...”

The question is circling around in his mind.

As he approached, he realises that the priest’s breathing is a little irregular.

Why, is he here...

Just as Red is spacing out, he is suddenly punched in the face.

“You stinking brat...!!”

Red falls on the floor but quickly sits up in shock.

Did I do something?

Just as he thought that, he froze.

“--!”

A gun is suddenly pointed at his forehead.

Red breathes in sharply.

The priest approaches him, full of killing intent, Red could smell a lingering smell of cigarette smoke.

It was not like Cosmos, who had an unkind expression, or the Ringmaster, whose gaze held authority.

It was really a gaze filled with killing intent.

Killing people, killing, after killing a lot of people, would a person obtain that sort of expression?

The eyes of the priest were filled with blood.

“I told you not to get close to Mana, didn’t I?”

This time, I will really get killed--

Just as he thought that, the priest’s face collided with something. It was a large impact.

It was that yellow thing, it threw the metal bar it was still holding on to.

“Tim!”

--What was that, this is? A living thing? Why would it save me?

“Che!”

The priest glares at Red, and kept the gun.

“I ran out of bullets.”

The reason did not explain anything.

The priest forcefully picks Red up, who had already turned stiff.

“Don’t forget, this is all because of you.”

Saying that, he released his hold roughly.

Red falls on the ground again.

“Disappear.”

He said that with a sigh, and disappears into the darkness together with the yellow thing.

Red could only stare at the darkness.

If I stay here, I will be killed—

He realises that, and runs away quickly.

He can’t stay in the circus anymore.

But he is still concerned about Mana.

What happened after that?

He regrets leaving Mana there, this thought is tormenting him.

But Red remembers the priest's words, but he wants to return to the circus.

What should I do...

\*\*\*

The next morning, Red, who had wandered on the streets without a goal, returns to the circus without knowing how he got there.

He found the place surrounded by people.

What happened...where's Mana...?

Red listens quietly to the voices of the people around him.

"Disappeared? That many performers?"

"Yeah, the Ringmaster and some of the other helpers are still around. The others have disappeared in one night. It seems like the performance cannot be held anymore."

"!"

Red is shocked.

When he was locked inside the animal cage, he could still hear cheers coming from the tent.

I thought, the performers were still performing as usual---

That many members could disappear so quickly?

"And it seems like they didn't run away. The clothes of the missing members are still around!"

"All the clothes all carry traces of being shot. And there were rumours that they were attacked, but there were no bodies...it really doesn't make sense!"

"...what, really happened, even though it's Christmas!"

Red silently left the chatting crowd in order to hide his expression.

His heart is beating very fast.

The missing members.

What happened after I was bought to the animal cage by the Ringmaster and the others?

Did Mana—disappear too?

Who was that red haired priest?

Even though he's a priest—but he still carries a gun, and has the smell of cigarettes on him.

And, he even wanted to kill me...

--don't forget, it's all because of you.

The words which the man wearing priest robes said echoed in his mind.

"Ah--!!"

Red shouted.

"Mana!"

Appearing from the crowd was Mana, wearing a rather dirty clown suit.

Just like yesterday, his head and face is covered in blood.

--You're alright!

Mana took a look at Red and smiled.

"Where have you been , Allen?"

"Eh?"

Red stared at Mana, shocked.

"Mana?"

Allen is the dog's name. And it was even a dead dog's—

Mana did not notice Red's feelings of uneasiness.

"Today is Christmas! Okay, let's go to a different place!"

"Mana...? What's wrong? I'm not Allen. Allen is...!"

Mana did not hear any of Red's cries.

Instead he took Red's hand and started walking.

"Right, where should we go next?"

"Instead of that, don't you need to do something about your head wound?"

"Does Allen have a place he wants to go?"

"Mana!"

Mana is very strange.

"Mana? Hey, Mana?"

"Hmm—where should we go? Strange, why, am I travelling?"

Mana tilts his head.

Red, hearing this unbelievable statement, froze entirely.

"You said...to look for your little brother..."

"Little brother?"

Mana stops walking all of a sudden.

"What's that?"

Mana is smiling as usual, Red turned stiff.

--he had forgotten his motive for travel entirely.

Why?

Because I hit him too much?

--Don't forget, this is all because of you.

The priest's words hurt Red again.

Don't tell me...it's because of me? Because I hit him with this cursed hand many times...?

"I feel that...I'm looking for something really important."

Mana is still smiling.

This tone of voice is even.

But his whole body is shaking.

He is sad.

Because he had lost his memory.

His hand, which is being held, can feel it.

"You're looking for your little brother! Your little brother who was separated from you. Didn't you say it, yesterday!"

Mana did not react.

Only one night, and Mana had changed entirely.

Red stares at Mana with a helpless look.

Quietly, something white drifts down.

It's snow—

From above the two of them, falling quietly, collecting on their bodies.

Snow, which can turn everything white—

“Mana...”

Mana, cannot revert back anymore.

He had this feeling.

Tears fall from Red's eyes.

Mana stretches out his hand slowly.

“Don't be sad...if you're sad, the Earl will come.”

He says with an empty voice as he rubs away Red's tears.

“Allen is really warm. And, strange? Why have you grown so big? And you don't have a tail as well.”

He mixed me up with the dog.

Red had to admit while feeling totally hopeless.

Mana...

The person who was destroyed by me.

“Take me with you Mana. I'll tell you, what you have forgotten...I'll remember it for you....please. Take me with you...”

This is my reason for living.

Mana...playing in the snowy night with your dog, then going out to the streets with you yesterday, it was the first time I felt “happiness” together with someone else.

So, this time, it's my turn.

To make you happy.

I will become your Allen.

“We'll be together always, Allen.”

Mana says innocently, these words hurt Red's heart very much.

“...That's true, we'll always be together...”

Then Red and Mana walked towards the snow.

Always, the two of them, together.

This was the day Red, the young boy, became Allen.

Allen's story will start from now on.

Meeting the priest again, travelling with a golem, becoming an Exorcist—that will be another story.

-----END-----

### **Afterword**

Hello everyone, this is Hoshino Katsura.

This is the third volume of the awaited novel, the stories have some relation to the main story this time and both these stories were written by Kizaki-san.

The one that gave me the most trouble while creating (laugh) is Mana and Allen's story.

Allen's past is still a total mystery, and was practically not talked about in the original work, and even the more mysterious Mana makes an appearance...it might be really great to turn it into a novel, I started working on it with such relaxed feelings, but~it was still really hard.

Even though the meeting between Mana and Allen is a simple story, but in order to integrate more mysteries related to the original work, this time Kizaki-san suggested for the first time to produce a work with more structure and collaboration.

This time, I felt really strongly, that I definitely would not become a novelist... (laugh)

It's really too difficult to tell a story just using words.

I really admire Kizaki-san a lot, she could craft my rough transcript into such a brilliant objective story.

After so long, being able to work with Kizaki-san again made me feel so happy.

And, to the Fan who is holding the book in your hand right now, I'm very thankful for your support.

I work hard for everyone who has read the entire story, I'm happy if I'm able to make you feel some happiness as well.

Then, I'll see you next time.

Hoshino Katsura

Hello everyone, this is Kizaki Kaya.

This is the third volume of the novel.

To the old and new readers, thank you for picking up the book.

This time is the story of Roufa as well as Allen and Mana.

Roufa's story is about a maiden in love, I felt really happy while creating this piece!

How should I write about Roufa's romance next? (Even though I'm still writing the short story, but just asking that will cause my heart to beat faster)—I suggest you wait patiently for the stories in this volume.

And Allen and Mana's story has some connections to Allen and Mana's story in the original series.

In order to write this story, I re-read the original series, and felt some pain when I saw Allen's smile and determination.

I feel fortunate that I am able to show the D.Gray-man world to everyone in this fashion.

Lastly, the acknowledgments.

Hoshino-san, who has cared for me, thank you very much!

Lastly, thank you to all the readers who have read this book.

Some day in November 2010  
Kizaki Kaya

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